DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 228 CE 083 170

AUTHOR Phan, Oanh; Saunders, Stephen
TITLE The Benefits of Modular Study in Vocational Education and Training.
INSTITUTION National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook (Australia).
ISBN ISBN-1-74096-043-2
PUB DATE 2002-00-00
NOTE 63p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 252 Kensington Road, Leabrook, South Australia 5068, Australia (Stock no. 779, $15.40 Australian). Tel: 08-8333-8400; Fax: 08-8331-9211; e-mail: vet_req@ncver.edu.au; Web site: http://www.ncver.edu.au. For full text: http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/core/cp9905.pdf.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Case Studies; Developed Nations; Employment Patterns; *Enrollment Influences; Foreign Countries; *Job Training; *Learning Modules; Learning Motivation; *Minicourses; Outcomes of Education; Postsecondary Education; Sex Differences; Student Educational Objectives; *Student Motivation; Unemployment; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Australia

ABSTRACT

A study investigated industry and employment characteristics and outcomes of module enrollees and completers in vocational education and training (VET) in Australia. VET enrollment data showed module students were older than course enrollment students, more likely to be female, and to have completed Year 12. While VET module students and full-course students were both driven mainly by vocational motives, expectations in the latter group were more about extra skills for the present job rather than a new job. One module subgroup enrolled in primarily technological or skill upgrading areas; another targeted basic skills. Female students were more likely to discontinue module training for personal or training-related motives; males for employment-related motives. In student outcomes surveys, over 70 percent of module-only students were in employment 6 months after course completion, only slightly less than full-course graduates. Module case studies were based on 38 students, mostly employed, undertaking trade and business-related modules at five technical and further education institutes. Findings indicated most employed students were studying to sharpen their skills and knowledge for existing jobs; unemployed students chose modules to update skills to re-enter the workforce; and the key word that wrapped up students' motivations was "flexibility." Actions useful to VET stakeholders were suggested. Appendixes include questions and the project brief used in the case studies. (Contains 20 references and 19 tables.) (YLB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 464 228

NCVER

The **benefits** of **modular study** in **vocational education** and **training**

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN
MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Hayman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
2B

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Oanh Phan

Stephen Saunders

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CE083170

The **benefits** of **modular study** in **vocational education** and **training**

Oanh Phan

Stephen Saunders

NCVER

© 2002 National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd

ISBN 1 74096 043 2 print edition
ISBN 1 74096 044 0 web edition
TD/TNC 69.04

Published by NCVER
ABN 87 007 967 311

252 Kensington Road, Leabrook, SA 5068
PO Box 115, Kensington Park, SA 5068, Australia
www.ncver.edu.au

Contents

Acknowledgements 5

Executive summary 6

Background 9
- Project definitions and aims 9
- The policy environment 10
- Statistical and research background 11
- Research on module issues 13

Methodology 15
- Analysis of module enrolments 15
- Analysis of module completers 16
- Approach to the case studies 17

The profiles of VET module enrolment students 18
- Demographic characteristics 18
- Areas of learning 20
- Funding and financial support 22
- Summary 23

Factors influencing VET students to enrol in modules 24
- Reasons for undertaking module training 24
- Reasons for discontinuing training 26
- Summary 29

Employment and related outcomes for VET module students 31
- Employment outcomes 32
- Other employment indicators 34
- Training satisfaction 37
- Summary 40

Case studies of VET module students 41
- New South Wales 41
- South Australia 43
- Australian Capital Territory 46
- Summary 47

Summary and conclusions 50
- Policy and research summary 50
- VET module students—characteristics and outcomes 51
- VET module students—case studies 53
- Conclusions and suggested actions 53

References 57

Appendix A: Project brief used in case studies 58

Appendix B: Questions used in case studies 59

List of tables

Table 1: VET students by module and course enrolments by demographic characteristics, 1999 19
Table 2: Backgrounds of VET students by module and course enrolments, 1999 20
Table 3: VET students by module and course enrolments by area of learning, 1999 21
Table 4: Funding sources for modules undertaken by VET students, by course and module enrolments, 1999 (%) 22
Table 5: Sources of income for VET students while they undertake training in the VET sector, 2000 23
Table 6: Factors influencing VET students to undertake training in the VET sector, 2000 24
Table 7: Factors influencing VET students to undertake training in the VET sector, by age and sex, 2000 25
Table 8: Reasons indicated by module completers for not continuing with training program, by sex, 2000 27
Table 9: Reasons given by male module completers for discontinuing studies, by age, 2000 28
Table 10: Reasons given by female module completers for discontinuing studies, by age, 2000 29
Table 11: The effectiveness of VET training programs in helping vocationally oriented module completers to achieve their goals, 2000 31
Table 12: Employment status of module completers before and after training, 2000 32
Table 13: Employed module completers and the general workforce, by industry of employment, 2000 33
Table 14: Employed module completers and the general workforce, by occupation, 2000 34
Table 15: Employer support for module completers while undertaking VET modules, 2000 35
Table 16: Module completers who benefit from undertaking VET modules, by type of benefit, 2000 36
Table 17: Relevance of training to module completers' current employment, 2000 36
Table 18: Module completers' levels of satisfaction with VET training, 2000 38
Table 19: TAFE graduates' levels of satisfaction with VET training, 2000 39

Acknowledgements

John Saunders from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research was responsible for conducting and writing up the case studies in New South Wales and South Australia. The authors wish to acknowledge John's expertise and assistance in this project.

Brian Knight and Katrina Ball of NCVER contributed valuable readings of the first consolidated draft of the report.

Special thanks go to the following TAFE institute people for their assistance with the case studies:

Berwyn Clayton	Canberra Institute of Technology (ACT)
Arthur Crossan	Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE, Chullora Campus (NSW)
Steve Hall	Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE, Chullora Campus (NSW)
Graham Jensen	Canberra Institute of Technology (ACT)
Anne Marett	Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE, Chullora Campus (NSW)
Carmen Moschetti	Regency Institute of TAFE, Elizabeth Campus (SA)
Lucy Silvestri	Regency Institute of TAFE, Elizabeth Campus (SA)
John Sutton	Canberra Institute of Technology (ACT)
Chris Steele	Regency Institute of TAFE, Elizabeth Campus (SA)
Jean Taddeo	Regency Institute of TAFE, Elizabeth Campus (SA)
John Turner	Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE, Chullora Campus (NSW)

Executive summary

This report is prompted by recent shifts in Australian vocational education and training (VET) policy towards lifelong learning and is enabled by the increasing recognition of VET 'module' study and the measurement of its outcomes. The aim is to investigate the industry and employment characteristics and outcomes of module enrollees and completers in VET.

Until quite recent years, VET measurement and research has emphasised full-course students and enrolments, in the sense of courses leading to a full qualification. The 'module' concept is that of a student (deliberately) taking a program of VET study not leading to a qualification. Such 'module' students form a significant part of the VET student profile.

In practice, over 40% of VET students appear to be primarily module rather than full-course oriented, in that they are taking one or two modules only in a given year. This is a much higher percentage than that derived from the official count of VET 'module-only' enrolments as a proportion of all VET enrolments. On the completions side, several researchers argue for the significance of the finding that the number of 'module completers' in VET each year is about twice as high (200 000 or more) as the number of VET graduates.

The VET enrolment and outcomes statistics show that the module students, while differing in some demographic respects, are like the qualifications group in their predominantly vocational focus and their predominantly favourable employment outcomes.

The report begins with a statistical investigation of module students and their outcomes, based on the evidence of the VET enrolment data and the VET student outcomes surveys. The enrolment data, while incomplete in their enumeration of module students, shed light on the module students' profiles and motivations. The outcomes surveys, which moved beyond VET graduates only in 1999 to cover 'module completers', are already beginning to provide consistent indications of expected outcomes.

The enrolment data show that module students are on average older than course enrolment students, more likely to be female and to have completed Year 12. In part, this may be a 'sectoral' effect, in that the adult and community education (ACE) sector, where students also tend to be older and are more likely to be female, is an important provider of VET modules.

While VET module students and full-course students are both driven mainly by vocational motives, expectations in the latter group are more about extra skills for the present job rather than a new job.

Variations within the module group of students are to be noted and are of possible significance to course planning and further research.

One module subgroup appears to be enrolling in primarily technological or skill-upgrading areas, while another is targeting basic skills courses. Female students are more likely to discontinue (module) training for personal or training-related motives; males for employment-related motives. In the older age brackets, both sexes are more likely to discontinue because they have got what they wanted out of the training, or because their training directions have changed, rather than for employment-related motives (mainly changes in job status).

In the student outcomes surveys, over 70% of module-only students are to be found in employment six months after course completion, only slightly lower than the result for full-course graduates. Measurable proportions of module completers, about 40% and 30% respectively, have moved into employment from unemployment or from having no labour force attachment. For comparison, 50% of unemployed people who take Job Search Training through the Job Network are in jobs or education after three months.

This report is based mainly on analysis of the student outcomes surveys up to and including 2000. In the 2001 survey, the percentage of module completers in employment six months after training falls slightly (from 71% to 67%), as does the percentage of module completers moving from unemployment into employment (from 40% to 35%). Similar falls, however, are also observable in the case of VET graduates. This suggests that the slightly poorer employment outcomes experienced by 2001 module completers are due to declines in the labour market rather than declines in the quality or usefulness of module-only training.

One possible sign of the wide acceptance or usefulness of modular study is that employed module completers are spread across industries and occupations in much the same way as employed persons generally. They tend to be self-improvers, who boost their present careers to a certain degree, rather than starting new ones. Most remain in the same occupation and industry of employment. Of those who stay with the same employer, only about half have fees reimbursed or paid time off, and less than half indicate some form of job advancement or higher earnings.

The report goes on to consider the findings of a small set of module case studies, based on some 38 students, mostly employed, undertaking a variety of trade and business-related modules at five TAFE institutes in New South Wales (2), South Australia (2), and the Australian Capital Territory (1).

Consistent with the student outcomes surveys, the case studies find that most of the employed students are studying to sharpen their skills and knowledge for their existing jobs (or businesses). The unemployed students are choosing modules to update skills to re-enter the workforce, sometimes under obligation to Centrelink.

The key word that wraps up the motivations of the students in the case studies is 'flexibility'. Study and time commitments are flexible. Students can take up the

course that is apt for their needs, with more reasonable cost and more confidence of success, and with less distraction from peripherals.

Several students had major educational commitments in the school or university sectors, with module study in the VET sector enabling them to fill out their overall education and training plans. A number of students were applying modules to plug specific skill gaps remembered from previous work experience, or anticipated in future work or business experiences. The positives of module study tend to outweigh perceived negatives, such as limited social contact, disjointed study, or concerns about the value of module study with employers.

The conclusions of the report revisit the main directions and themes. While recent policy evolutions may have promoted module study, much, it is argued, remains to be done. The quantity and quality of measurement and research of modular study do not do justice to its proven utility to VET clients. The national VET collections on modular study do not match the yardsticks in the agreed national statistical standard.

The VET client base is very different in its structure and needs from the higher education student base. It also presents a much stronger case that policy and research should mainstream unit (module) enrolment and completion in with graduate enrolment and completion.

Generally speaking, there is a case for more intensive research and measurement of module study and the factors associated with successful outcomes and employment, including more work through the student outcomes surveys and employer satisfaction surveys. Wherever possible, this should examine the important practical roles of TAFE, ACE and private providers in working with employers and students towards more effective module provision.

Finally, there is a case for greater focus on modular provisions in national and State VET plans. That case derives from the underestimated popularity and effectiveness of modular study in meeting the aspirations and training needs of employed and other students.

Some suggested actions that might be of use to VET stakeholders are given in the final chapter. In brief, they relate to:

- improving the collection standards for VET module statistics
- integrating the measurement and reporting of VET module and course enrolments
- building on the successful introduction of module study into the student outcomes survey
- investigating employers' needs and satisfaction in terms of employee module students
- encouraging employers to understand and reward VET modular study
- encouraging training providers to deliver VET modules appropriately and effectively
- moving modules further into the mainstream of VET planning

Background

Project definitions and aims

The encouragement of lifelong learning is one important aim of the Australian vocational education and training (VET) system. The recognition of the concept of 'module' enrolments in VET, in addition to enrolments towards qualifications, gives practical effect to that aim.

In a generalised sense, a 'module' in VET may be thought of as a distinct VET subject or unit or, in terms of the post-1998 National Training Framework, as a unit of competency from a recognised training package. In the former sense especially, 'modules' are not a new feature of the VET system.

In a more specific sense, a VET module (student) may be defined as an entity that may be studied distinctly from, but is related to, a VET qualification (student). It is that sense, which aligns to current measurement concepts used in the VET sector, which activates this project.

A module may be defined, following the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) student outcomes survey of VET (NCVER 2000c, 2000d), as a program or unit of VET study not leading to a qualification. The same definition applies to the enrolment statistics in *Australian vocational education and training statistics 1999: In detail* (NCVER 2000a) and *Statistics 1999: At glance* (NCVER 2000b).

From these publications, a 'module enrollee' may be thought of as a student enrolled in a program with a VET provider, but not intending to proceed to a qualification. Similarly, a 'module completer' is a student who is not a graduate but has successfully completed some training in a VET program of study and then left the VET system.

In the VET enrolment statistics (NCVER 2000a, 2000b), module enrollees with all types of VET providers (TAFE, adult and community education [ACE] or community providers, and other registered providers) are covered.

Unlike the enrolment statistics, the student outcomes survey does not cover module enrollees or graduates from non-TAFE providers. In 1999, about 19% (NCVER 2000b) of all module and unit of competency enrollees were with non-TAFE providers.

Despite this limitation, the value of the student outcomes survey is that it was extended in 1999 to include statistics on module completers as well as graduates in

TAFE. Here, a 'graduate' is defined as a student who has satisfactorily completed a course of study (leading to a certificate or higher qualification) in TAFE.

Hence, it is now possible to access statistics directly comparing the employment and satisfaction outcomes of TAFE module completers and TAFE graduates. The availability of such statistics makes this project and its case studies a much more practicable and useful proposition.

Many people who are undertaking VET courses are upskilling within their existing vocation or are undertaking short courses as a precursor to changing jobs. Many of these students are not actively seeking a qualification but are engaged in short courses of one or few modules.

This project focuses on people who have left VET, or intend to leave VET, after completing some modules rather than finishing a complete qualification.

The project examines the employment and industry characteristics of these module enrollees and completers in VET. It aims to go beyond the data to examine the reasons and motivations for module (as opposed to course) enrolment, and to study the types of module providers and programs that are associated with the more positive employment and employer outcomes and with lifelong learning.

The project uses the information on module enrollees and completers from the national collection of VET providers, especially as published in *Statistics 1999: At a glance* (NCVER 2000b), and from the student outcomes survey. This was also supplemented by case studies conducted with individuals still in the VET system, but who are known to have chosen to study modules rather than a complete qualification.

The policy environment

The project relates to evolving VET policy and its further development. It is important to situate the project in relation to the changes in VET thinking that have led to clearer identification of 'modules' as a concept and as a useful mode of VET provision for TAFE institutes and other VET providers.

The greater recognition of modules in VET follows from recent developments in national VET strategy and performance measurement.

The National VET Strategy for 1998–2003 (ANTA 1998) envisions Australian workers desiring 'lifelong learning', the capacity to update and review vocational skills throughout their working lives. The strategy defines five key objectives, namely equipping Australians for the world of work, enhancing mobility in the labour market, achieving equitable outcomes in VET, increasing investment in training, and maximising the value of public VET expenditure.

To equip Australians for work, it is important for individuals and enterprises to have choice and flexibility in their learning pathways. The national strategy urges registered training organisations to offer products and services that are tailored to the needs of industry and individuals.

Developing the opportunities for VET modular study, in addition to study towards qualifications, increases the overall availability of flexible learning pathways in VET. As foreshadowed in the national strategy, a national framework (ANTA 2000) has now been developed to accelerate the take-up of flexible learning modes and flexible training delivery.

Following the national strategy, the Performance Review Committee (ANTA 1999) produced *Key performance measures for vocational education and training,* to take full effect in reporting from 2001. There are eight key performance measures (KPMs) which, in brief, cover skill outputs, stocks of skills, employers' views, student outcomes and prospects, participation and outcomes by client groups, public expenditure per publicly funded output, public expenditure per total output, and total VET expenditure.

KPM4, which reads as 'student employment outcomes and prospects before and after VET participation', has had an effect in boosting the interest in, and scrutiny of, VET modular study.

Admittedly, module completion rates as a measure predate the work of the review committee. However, the committee's work broadens VET measurement concepts, reducing the emphasis on VET outputs and outcomes in terms of, respectively, numbers of hours delivered by the VET system and its numbers of qualifications or graduations.

While delivery hours and graduation numbers are still central measures, they are somewhat indirect or intermediate (non-client-based) measures of positive educational and employment outcomes. An advantage of KPM4 is that it introduces a direct (client-reported) measure, the level of employment after VET compared to that before. It also introduces as secondary measures further enrolments in VET, achievement and satisfaction, and employment advantages after VET.

With the inception of KPM4, the former TAFE graduate destination survey has come to be refined into a student outcomes survey (NCVER 1999b, 2000d, 2001d).

While the sample sizes in the case of module completers are still relatively small in 1999 and 2000, the important thing is that the survey measures module satisfaction and employment outcomes alongside graduate satisfaction outcomes. In fact, the student outcomes survey for 2001 greatly expands the sample size in the case of module completers.

Statistical and research background

The Australian VET statistics series (NCVER 1999a, 2000a, 2000b, 2001c) and the student outcomes survey series (NCVER 1999b, 2000d) are the main sources of reliable statistical information on module frequencies and outcomes. Findings from the latter are addressed in detail in the next chapter.

As a generalisation, these statistical sources could be said to demonstrate that modular study in VET is popular among students and relatively effective in generating (job) outcomes.

Officially, about 6% of VET students in 1999, or 93 000 out of 1 647 000 (NCVER 2000b), were enrolled in modules only. That is, they were not undertaking a full course or program of study. In 2000 (NCVER 2001c), the percentage was 5%, or about 87 000 out of 1 750 000. However, these figures underestimate the actual frequency of module enrolments, as some State recording systems and some providers assign students to qualification-directed courses even if they are really only studying modules. According to NCVER (2000b), Victoria had the highest incidence of students studying modules only, over 17% of its total number of VET students. Some other States record very low incidences, but almost certainly part of this effect relates to under-collection rather than differences in student behaviour.

Frequency distributions of VET clients according to the number of modules taken are another, perhaps more useful, indication of the popularity of module study. Recent statistics indicate that, consistently, over 40% of VET students only take one or two modules in a study year. In 1999 (NCVER 2000a) over 43% of the total VET clientele was enrolled in one or two modules only, as opposed to three or more. The equivalent figures for 1998 and 1997 are 45% (NCVER 1999a) and 46% (cited in Dumbrell 2000, p.16).

In a later paper, Dumbrell and colleagues contend that module completers are, if anything, 'the norm for the VET system' (Dumbrell, de Montfort & Finnegan 2001, p.8). On 1998 NCVER figures, it is estimated that there are about 246 000 VET module completers as compared to 113 000 VET graduates.

While these annual figures are striking, it should be pointed out that they will tend to understate the case for graduates. Unlike one or two modules of study, a substantial proportion of qualification courses will contain more hours than may readily be completed in one year of study, especially if that be part-time study. Close to one half (NCVER 1999a, p.10, table 11) of those studying for qualifications at or above certificate III level are carrying less than 200 hours of study a year.

For the two years of survey data available (NCVER 1999b, 2000d), the indicators are that module completers are quite similar to graduates in their demographic profiles, fields of study, course satisfaction ratings and employment outcomes. They are an important part of the VET student profile and a valuable aspect of VET services.

Adjusting to the new survey benchmark used in 2000, the employment rate of TAFE graduates was about 76% in both 1999 and 2000, as compared to 70–71% for module completers.

In 2000, the most popular fields of study for module completers were business and related (22%), VET multi-field (19%), engineering and related (15%) and services and related (11%). The distribution of study for graduates was fairly similar, but with the 'health and related' field of study substituting for the 'VET multi-field' field of study in second place.

In 1999, and again in 2000, both graduates and module completers score nearly eight out of ten for overall satisfaction with their study. However, employed module completers are rather less likely than employed graduates (over 40% as compared to over 60%) to receive at least one employment benefit, in terms of increased pay, promotion, or a new job.

More details on the characteristics and outcomes of module students, as derived from the national VET collection and the student outcomes survey, are discussed in the third to sixth chapters.

Research on module issues

With the recency of the policy and measurement interest in VET modules, there is limited research available to complement the basic statistics. Maxwell, Cooper and Biggs (2000) primarily studied how people choose VET programs, but their findings are quite relevant to the provision of VET modules. Based on surveys of VET providers and students, they find that prior work experience is the most influential factor in choosing VET, followed by parent–guardian influences and school performance. In order of prevalence, the most common reasons cited for actually enrolling in VET are to get a job, to realise personal aspirations, and to upgrade skills—also common motives for module-only enrollees. Choice of a particular VET provider is found by Maxwell and colleagues to link to factors such as convenience, affordability, practical opportunities, quality of provision and college ambience.

Considering the factors they have uncovered which appear to influence choices of VET and of VET providers, Maxwell, Cooper and Biggs urge:

- flexibility of training provision (in terms of following students' long-term horizons and personal development needs)
- further improvements in the status of VET among the sectors of education
- a greater diversity of training providers
- better dissemination of VET information

Maxwell, Cooper and Biggs (2000, p.82) also express a scepticism similar to that found in the critiques of Anderson (1997a, 1997b) about the value of the training market (including employer-driven VET competencies and training packages). They share Anderson's concern that there may be a substantial gap between national VET policy and individual student interests.

While these might appear at first sight to be secondary issues, they are relevant in that value judgements about the national and market nature of VET may have the capacity to work for or against the inclusion of modules in the policy and measurement frameworks for VET. The issues recur in the work of Foyster, Fai and Shah (2000), Dumbrell (2000), and Dumbrell, de Montfort and Finnegan (2001), among the few recent VET writers to examine module study and outcomes seriously. Examining students who enrolled in 1994 and the subsequent VET data for the period 1994–96, Foyster, Fai and Shah made an ambitious effort to develop and apply a methodology to analyse the actual flows of students through TAFE. They were concerned that conventional completion rates for entire courses were not an ideal indicator of outcomes. Especially, these computed rates did not include actual but unreported course completions. Thus, Foyster, Fai and Shah defined 'full completion' as the sum of hours of all modules completed being equal to, or greater than, the sum of hours designated for the relevant course and 'partial completion' as having completed at least one module and failed none before leaving TAFE.

For the period of interest, national TAFE system flows and probabilities of full or partial completion (as defined) are estimated, via a Markov chain model. In many fields of social science, Markov techniques are used routinely to estimate the probable flows of population cohorts over time through defined states of progression or promotion. Of interest is the authors' claim that this has not been attempted before in the VET literature.

The key finding is that partial (module) completion is a very significant outcome, an effect that holds good when the population is divided up by age, sex or field of study. It is estimated that almost half of the total enrolments (49%) are going to result in partial (module) completion, but only a quarter (27%) in full completion.

> *This suggests a significant degree of flexibility in the TAFE system to accommodate students who wish to acquire skills or competencies as they need them ... Ignoring or not measuring partial completions would be a gross underestimation of the true output of the TAFE system.* (Foyster, Fai & Shah 2000)

In his survey of outcome measurement practices in VET, Dumbrell (2000) approves of the recent inclusion of module outcomes in the student outcomes survey, agreeing with Foyster and colleagues that such outcomes have not been well-recognised by VET analysts and policy-makers. Here, and again in a later paper (Dumbrell, de Montfort & Finnegan 2001, p.7), he remarks on the line that is drawn between 'educational' and 'labour market' or 'economic' theories of VET and VET outcomes, and on the attempts to bridge this divide.

It might have been thought that modular study in VET is primarily a short-run aspirational or educational activity that ought to be scrutinised primarily via educational measures. Yet, as the early years of the student outcomes survey demonstrate, modular study rates favourably when scrutinised with the aid of labour market (job outcome) measures.

Dumbrell (2000) notes that the area of greatest dissatisfaction among module completers is, as it is among graduates, course and career information rather than the courses themselves and their teaching and delivery standards. He urges further work on labour market measures, particularly measures of the labour market impact of modular study.

Foyster, Fai and Shah (2000) make a similar call for further research. They ponder the reasons for partial (module) completion, speculating that it may link to job imperatives, such as the need for quick and relevant skill acquisition with minimum disruption to production and productivity. Without wishing to make too much of the variations in full and partial completion by age and by field of study, they suggest that these variations may relate to differences in assessment standards, quality of teaching, and student aptitude or motivation.

Where possible, the research pointers in these last two studies have been taken up in the case studies that are described in the sixth chapter.

Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology in the approach to the analysis of module enrolments and completers and to the case studies.

The main points are:

- The report data on module enrolments are based on those who have enrolled in at least one module in 1999. Technically, the modules that these students have enrolled in do not have a course identifier attached.
- The data on module completers are derived from unpublished tables drawn from the 2000 student outcomes survey sample of module completers.
- The case studies have been developed to follow on, as far as possible, from the known characteristics of module enrollees and the known satisfaction and employment outcomes of module completers.

Analysis of module enrolments

Since the introduction of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical (AVETMIS) Standard[1] in 1994, training providers have been able to report if a student is enrolling in a fully recognised course or in modules only.

Given the administrative inconvenience, and that students do not always know in advance if they are going to stick to module study, training providers do not always distinguish module enrolment students in their reporting.

To distinguish module-only enrolment students from those who enrolled in a fully recognised course, the revised AVETMIS Standard of 1996 continued to encourage training providers to remove the course identifier from students who enrolled in modules only. Nonetheless, training providers were slow to do so. As a result, there were only 116 module-only enrolments reported in 1996.

In recent years, the number of module-only enrolments reported under the AVETMIS Standard has been increasing. The total numbers of students reported as having enrolled in modules only were 22 000, and about 23 500, for 1997 and 1998 respectively. Although the number of students reported as having enrolled in modules

[1] The AVETMIS Standard offers a nationally consistent standard for the collection, analysis and reporting of vocational education and training information throughout Australia.

only had increased to about 90 000 in 1999 and 2000 (NCVER 2000b, 2001c), still not all States and Territories are reporting module-only enrolment activities. Consequently, the total number of students undertaking studies in the VET sector with no desire to complete a fully recognised qualification is higher than is currently being reported under the AVETMIS Standard.

Of some 1.6 million VET students enrolled in a fully recognised course in 1999, approximately a third of these enrolled in one module only (NCVER, unpublished data). Or, as noted in the first chapter, in recent years over 40% of VET students are only taking one or two modules.

In this project, the view has been taken that 'taking one or two modules (and no course)' is a more useful and realistic indication of primarily module-study intentions than 'module-only enrolment'. Hence, this definition has been applied in tables 1–4 of the following chapter that study sex, age and other characteristics of module enrollees.

This definition, too, is only approximate, as NCVER data-matching exercises suggest that up to 25% of the one-or-two module group in 1998 continued with the VET study in 1999. Such continuation, however, does not in itself indicate an intention to complete a full course as opposed to further modules.

Little is known of the factors influencing some training providers to report on module-only enrolment activities. Some training providers may be reporting module-only enrolment activities because they have become more proficient at addressing data-reporting requirements over the years. Others may be reporting because it is becoming increasingly apparent to them that not all students undertaking studies in the VET sector intend to complete a full course.

Better knowledge about module students and the extent to which the VET sector is serving their needs can only be achieved if training providers are more responsive to data-reporting requirements. The information could be used to assist training providers and policy-makers to design more effective training programs that address the needs of the large numbers of VET students who prefer module study.

While the number of students enrolling in modules only is higher than is currently being reported under the AVETMIS Standard, the available data provide an understanding of the profile of these students and their areas of learning. In addition, the available data can assist in identifying how these students differ (if at all) from students who choose to study in the VET sector to gain a fully recognised qualification.

Analysis of module completers

In 2000, surveys were sent to a stratified, randomly selected sample of TAFE students who had completed their training six months previously. The survey aimed to determine the vocational outcomes for individuals who had completed part, but not all, of the training necessary to achieve a full qualification and those who had left the TAFE system having finished a full course of study. These types of individuals are defined as module completers, and TAFE graduates, respectively.

The year 2000 was only the second year that module completers had been included in the survey, which had begun originally in 1995 as a survey of TAFE graduates (only). Unit record data collected from the 2000 survey, known as the student outcomes survey (NCVER 1999b, 2000d), were used to determine the reasons or motivations for study by modules in the VET sector. In addition, vocational outcomes following the completion of VET training were assessed.

For the survey, NCVER selected 54 000 students who were thought to be module completers from the AVETMISS database. The sample was stratified by State and Territory, by TAFE institute, by sex and by age group. However, as the AVETMISS database is unable to identify if a student was continuing or not, a proportion of these students were not in fact 'module completers' in the terms of the definition. Of the 54 000 records supplied to the various jurisdictions, about 50 300 were mailed out. Of those students who received a questionnaire, 51.5% responded and of these 7922 (31%) turned out to be actual module completers.

The data-weighting procedure took account of TAFE institute, sex, age groups, and field of study groups. The sample of 7922 represented a population of 200 998 module completers. The *Student outcomes survey 2000: National report* (NCVER 2000d) contains more information about response rates and weighting procedures.

Tables 5–19 in the following chapters are based on unpublished data derived from the responses to the year 2000 student outcomes survey sample of module completers.

Approach to the case studies

Case studies derived from focus groups were conducted to obtain the perspectives of students undertaking VET by modules only. In fact, 38 students, enrolled in modules only, were selected from TAFE institutes in New South Wales (2), South Australia (2) and the Australian Capital Territory to provide insights into the demographic, motivational and course-related factors influencing their paths of study.

Information obtained from these individuals provided a better understanding of modular study in the labour market and the reasons for partial course completion. Information gained from analyses based on data collected under the AVETMIS Standard and the student outcomes survey guided the scope of the case studies.

There were five focus group discussions. Each group numbered from five to 13 students, who reported that they were studying at TAFE by modules only. During each session, students were given a project brief explaining the purpose of the study (refer to Appendix A) and a list of questions (Appendix B) that guided the focus group discussions. Students were also asked to provide their names and contact details should the researchers need to clarify further information.

The case studies were developed with the VET statistics and outcomes surveys in mind. Within the limits of a small survey, an attempt was made to match the students in the focus groups to the sex, age and other characteristics of the population of module students generally. Similarly, the questions applied to the students (Appendix B) were chosen to parallel, and probe further, the satisfaction and employment outcomes that are reported on in the student outcomes survey.

The profiles of VET module enrolment students

This chapter describes the general profiles and characteristics of vocational education and training students who chose to study by modules only. The next chapter concentrates on their enrolment motivations.

As mentioned, of all students who were reported as having enrolled in a fully recognised course in 1999, approximately a third enrolled in one module only and over 40% in one or two modules. The latter group is the basis for tables 1–4 here. Technically, these are students enrolled in one or two modules and who have not been allocated a course code in the reporting system.

In these same tables, the term 'course enrolment student' refers to students who are reported as having enrolled in a recognised course and enrolled in more than one module at a given time.

Table 5 is based on unpublished statistics from the 2000 student outcomes survey.

Demographic characteristics

The general profile of module students (as defined above) is shown in tables 1 and 2.

Although the proportion of women undertaking studies in the VET sector is slightly less than that for men, there is a larger proportion of female module students. In 1999, women comprised about 48% of all course students while women represented just over two thirds of module students (refer to table 1).

The age profile of module students differs substantially from that of course students. Typically, module students are older. In 1999, over 50% of module students were in the 35 to 59 age group while the proportion of course students in this age group was just over a third. On the other hand, almost 40% of course students were in the 15 to 24 age group, while less than 15% of all module students were in this age bracket.

Module students are more likely to be those who have already completed senior secondary schooling. In 1999, of those who reported the highest level of secondary schooling completed, over 60% of module students had completed Year 12. The highest level of secondary schooling completed by about 56% of course students was Year 11 or below.

In part, these age, sex and schooling observations are a 'sectoral' effect related to the community provider sector, which provides a large part of the ACE courses. TAFE is

responsible for about 75% of all VET students generally, whereas community providers and other registered providers account for about 15% and 10% respectively (NCVER 2000b, 2001b). However, the ACE sector is a stronghold of module as opposed to course study. Vocationally oriented ACE students are less likely than VET students generally to enrol for qualification courses and more likely (NCVER 2001a) to enrol for separate subjects or modules.

Module students are more likely to be community-provider and ACE students, particularly vocationally oriented ACE students, than to be in other sectors of VET. That being the case, they are more likely to follow known characteristics (NCVER 2001a) of ACE students, which are that they are on average older and more likely to be female.

Table 1: VET students by module and course enrolments by demographic characteristics, 1999

	Module enrolment students	Course enrolment students
Sex		
Female	67.1	47.8
Male	32.9	52.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**
Age		
Age 15–19 years	7.2	22.7
Age 20–24 years	7.6	17.0
Age 25–29 years	10.2	12.5
Age 30–34 years	11.4	10.3
Age 35–39 years	14.0	10.6
Age 40–49 years	24.3	16.5
Age 50–59 years	13.9	7.8
Age 60–64 years	4.2	1.3
Age 65 years and over	7.1	1.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**
Secondary schooling		
Completed Year 9	10.7	12.2
Completed Year 10	15.2	28.2
Completed Year 11	13.0	15.8
Completed Year 12	61.0	43.8
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from AVETMISS database

As with course students (refer to table 2), only a very small percentage of module students are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent or have a disability. Module students are slightly more likely to live in rural or remote areas, but slightly less likely to have a non-English-speaking background.

Table 2: Backgrounds of VET students by module and course enrolments, 1999

	Module enrolment students	Course enrolment students
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent		
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent	2.8	3.8
Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent	97.2	96.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**
Disability status		
Has a disability	5.4	4.6
Has no disabilities	94.6	95.4
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**
Non-English-speaking background		
Speak a language other than English	11.0	15.1
Speak English at home	89.0	84.9
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**
Born in an English-speaking country	16.9	25.3
Born in a non-English-speaking country	83.1	74.7
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**
Geographic region of residential address		
Capital city and metropolitan	54.7	65.4
Rural and remote	45.2	33.8
Outside Australia	0.1	0.8
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from AVETMISS database

Areas of learning

The areas of learning (refer to table 3) that are chosen by module and course students differ somewhat.

Module students are twice as likely (25% of total versus 11% of total) as course students to undertake modules to gain social, educational and employment skills.

In both cases, about 34% of students are enrolled in modules in the areas of 'mathematics and computing' or 'administration, business, economics and law'. However, in the case of module students, the split between these two areas is 23%–12%, but nearly the reverse (13%–21%) is the case for course students.

Another difference is that course students are rather more likely (11% versus 2%) to be enrolled in the 'engineering, processing' area of learning.

Table 3: VET students by module and course enrolments by area of learning, 1999

	Module enrolment students	Course enrolment students
Area of learning		
Humanities	7.5	6.7
Social studies	1.0	1.2
Education	2.7	1.2
Sciences	1.9	2.5
Mathematics, computing	22.6	13.2
Visual performing arts	6.5	2.9
Engineering, processing	2.2	11.4
Health sciences	8.1	10.3
Administration, business, economics, law	12.1	21.3
Built environment	1.0	4.6
Agriculture, renewable resources	2.9	4.7
Hospitality, tourism and personal services	6.6	9.2
Social, educational and employment skills	24.7	10.9
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from AVETMISS database

Of all module enrolments (as distinct from module students) in the 'mathematics and computing' area of learning, about 95% are in modules associated with computing or computing science. Although about 23% of module enrolments are in the 'mathematics, computing' area of learning as a whole, the proportion of module students enrolling in computing or computing science modules exceeds 46%[2].

Similarly, a quarter of module enrolments are in the 'social, educational and employment skills' area of learning. However, the proportion of module students undertaking modules in this area represents just over 53% of all module students.

The tendency for a large number of students to undertake studies in the area of computing or to gain social, educational and employment skills suggests that there could be two distinct groups of module students. On the one hand, many enrolling in modules appear to do so to upgrade their skills to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world of technology. Another group appears to be enrolling in modules to gain lower level preparatory skills to assist them to progress to other training programs, gain employment or participate in social and community activities.

[2] A number of students who chose to study by modules only enrol in more than one module at a given time. Therefore, the total number of module enrolments is generally greater than the total number of students.

Funding and financial support

Funding source

Although the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments provide the bulk of funding for VET training, the pattern of funding varies depending on the type of enrolment. Compared to module students, a larger proportion of modules undertaken by course students is funded by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. Funding for modules through fee-for-service activities is greater for students who are studying by modules, as compared to studying by courses.

In 1999, almost 90% of the modules undertaken by course students were funded by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. Less than two thirds of modules undertaken by students who chose to study by modules were funded from these sources. The funding for about 34% of modules undertaken by module students was generated through fee-for-service activities. The equivalent figure for modules enrolled in by course enrolment students was less than 10% (refer to table 4).

The fact that many VET students who choose to study by modules are prepared to pay their own tuition fee suggests that these individuals have specific and personal aspirations as well as employment-related needs. This is borne out by the later tabulations in the fifth chapter, which suggest that employed module completers accrue a mixture of personal benefits and benefits from the employer.

Table 4: Funding sources for modules undertaken by VET students, by course and module enrolments, 1999 (%)

Funding source	Module enrolment students	Course enrolment students
Commonwealth and State recurrent funding	63.4	86.1
Commonwealth and State specific funding	2.3	2.5
Fee for service	34.2	9.4
Full-fee-paying overseas student	0.1	2.0
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from AVETMISS database

Sources of income while doing training

In the 2000 student outcomes survey, module completers and TAFE graduates were asked to indicate the sources of income that they received while they were undertaking their training in the VET sector. There was generally not very much variation in the sources of income received by module completers and TAFE graduates (refer to table 5). The main sources of income available to these individuals were through paid work, parents or spouse/partner, government pension or benefits, and AUSTUDY.

Module completers, however, were more likely than TAFE graduates to receive an income from their own business or paid work while they were undertaking VET. TAFE graduates, on the other hand, were more likely than module completers to receive income from apprenticeships or other schemes such as AUSTUDY.

Table 5: Sources of income for VET students while they undertake training in the VET sector, 2000

	Module completers (%)	Graduates (%)
AUSTUDY	9.1	13.6
ABSTUDY	0.7	0.8
Government pensions or benefits	14.2	12.7
Apprenticeship	3.1	9.9
Traineeship	1.2	2.9
Scholarship/cadetship	0.1	0.1
Paid work	45.8	43.0
Own business	7.0	3.2
Parents or spouse/partner	14.4	15.0
Other, not stated	15.6	14.2
Totals (1)		

Note: (1) Totals not given, these add up to more than 100% because respondents were asked to provide as many sources of income as applicable

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Summary

Module students are on average older than course students. They are more likely to be female and to have completed Year 12. To some extent, these variations are to be expected and relate to the overlap between the 'module' sector of VET and the community provider and ACE sectors of VET. There is not a great difference between module and course students in terms of equity groups or place of residence.

Modules are more likely to suit older students who have already completed the first major vocational preparation in their lives, and perhaps more likely to suit the needs of women who are willing to, or need to, undertake retraining of some kind.

Many module students are enrolling in modules that would assist them to gain knowledge in computing areas, or to gain social, educational and employment skills. However, as with course students, the majority (75%) of module students are enrolled in vocationally or technically oriented areas of learning rather than in the basic skills.

Although the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments provide the majority of the funding for VET training, students who are studying by modules are more likely than those enrolled in a full course to pay for their own tuition fees.

The general profile of module students, the areas of learning chosen and the sources of income available during training will have important implications for the types of courses and course delivery that will suit them best, and for the vocational outcomes that these individuals achieve upon their departure from the VET sector.

Factors influencing VET students to enrol in modules

Reasons for undertaking module training

VET students generally choose to undertake training in the VET sector for vocational or work-related reasons. However, TAFE graduates are relatively more concerned with the vocational outcome than module completers. Almost 77% of TAFE graduates indicate that they chose to undertake training in the VET sector for vocational or work-related reasons, compared to about two thirds of module completers (refer table 6).

Of those undertaking training for vocational or work-related reasons, the most common reason cited by TAFE graduates (23% of the 77%) is that they chose to undertake VET training to assist them to gain a job (or own their own business). The module completers most commonly (20% of the 65%) choose to study in the VET sector to gain the extra skills for their (current) job.

Compared to TAFE graduates, a larger proportion (35% of total versus 23% of total) of module completers indicate that they chose to undertake training in the VET sector for non-vocational reasons, particularly for interest or for personal reasons.

Table 6: Factors influencing VET students to undertake training in the VET sector, 2000

	Module completers		Graduates	
	Number	Proportion (%)	Number	Proportion (%)
Vocational or work-related reasons	*128 682*	*65.4*	*98 878*	*76.8*
To get a job (or own business)	32 626	16.6	29 963	23.3
To try for a different career	20 606	10.5	15 711	12.2
To get a better job or promotion	14 406	7.3	13 329	10.4
It was a requirement of my job	20 948	10.6	21 495	16.7
I wanted extra skills for my job	40 096	20.4	18 380	14.3
Non-vocational reasons	*68 022*	*34.6*	*29 808*	*23.2*
To get into another course of study	8 470	4.3	7 905	6.1
For interest or personal reasons	48 541	24.7	17 326	13.5
Other reasons	11 011	5.6	4 577	3.6
Totals (weighted) (1)	**196 704**	**100.0**	**128 686**	**100.0**

Note: (1) See methodology chapter for a discussion of weighting
Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Overall, male module completers are somewhat more likely than female module completers to choose to study in the VET sector for vocational or work-related reasons (refer to table 7). At least three in every four males in the 20 to 44 age group indicate that they chose to study in the VET sector for vocational or work-related reasons. The equivalent figure for women in the 20 to 44 age group is about two thirds.

Table 7: Factors influencing VET students to undertake training in the VET sector, by age and sex, 2000

	15–19 yrs	20–24 yrs	25–34 yrs	35–44 yrs	45–54 yrs	55+ yrs	Total
Males							
Vocational or work-related reasons	*58.4*	*74.8*	*76.3*	*75.5*	*71.6*	*53.4*	***70.2***
To get a job (or own business)	31.4	24.5	9.9	8.2	9.7	10.1	**16.2**
To try for a different career	6.3	10.7	13.0	15.6	6.2	7.3	**10.5**
To get a better job or promotion	2.7	9.4	11.2	9.9	5.4	0.1	**7.4**
It was a requirement of my job	12.4	20.9	13.4	11.7	15.4	6.7	**14.0**
I wanted extra skills for my job	5.6	9.4	28.7	30.1	34.9	29.2	**22.1**
Non-vocational reasons	*28.5*	*22.5*	*19.6*	*20.6*	*24.7*	*38.6*	***24.1***
To get into another course of study	6.7	4.2	3.8	3.2	1.5	1.3	**3.8**
For interest or personal reasons	21.9	18.3	15.8	17.4	23.2	37.3	**20.3**
Other reasons	*13.1*	*2.7*	*4.1*	*3.9*	*3.7*	*8.0*	***5.7***
Total male respondents	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Females							
Vocational or work-related reasons	*46.6*	*64.6*	*69.6*	*66.6*	*61.9*	*44.2*	***61.1***
To get a job (or own business)	26.0	18.9	16.3	17.1	12.2	6.2	**17.2**
To try for a different career	7.3	12.1	14.2	11.4	9.2	4.9	**10.5**
To get a better job or promotion	4.7	11.6	9.2	7.2	6.3	2.3	**7.3**
It was a requirement of my job	4.5	6.5	8.5	8.7	6.2	9.5	**7.3**
I wanted extra skills for my job	4.1	15.6	21.4	22.1	28.0	21.3	**18.7**
Non-vocational reasons	*43.6*	*29.1*	*27.0*	*30.6*	*32.8*	*50.1*	***33.7***
To get into another course of study	11.4	6.7	2.5	2.9	3.5	2.2	**4.9**
For interest or personal reasons	32.2	22.4	24.5	27.7	29.3	47.8	**28.8**
Other reasons	*9.8*	*6.2*	*3.5*	*2.8*	*5.3*	*5.8*	***5.2***
Total female respondents	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Over 25% of male module completers in the 15 to 24 years age group indicate that they chose to study in the VET sector to assist them to gain employment (or own their business). This motive is less common with older males. Male module completers aged 25 years and older tend to participate in VET training to gain the extra skills necessary for their jobs.

Generally, female module completers in the 15 to 24 years age group are also more likely than those who are 25 years and over to participate in VET training to assist

them to get a job. Nevertheless, a large proportion of women aged 25 years and over also indicate that they chose their VET training to assist them to gain employment.

Reasons for discontinuing training

To gain a better understanding of the factors influencing module-only enrolment students to discontinue their studies from the VET sector, the student outcomes survey asks module completers to identify various reasons preventing them from completing a fully recognised course.

On the whole, employment-related reasons are the most important factors influencing many module completers to discontinue their studies. These are followed by reasons associated with training and personal matters (refer to table 8).

Of those who indicated that they chose to discontinue their studies for employment-related reasons, the majority reported that they left VET because they had changed jobs, started a new job or lost their job; the VET training hence no longer being relevant to them.

Module completers who left the VET sector for training-related reasons primarily believed that they had gained what they wanted from the training. Very few indicated that their VET training was irrelevant or did not meet their needs, or that the timetable was not sufficiently flexible.

Of those who reported that they left the VET sector for personal reasons, the majority indicated that they were experiencing too many pressures on their time.

Men and women have slightly different reasons for choosing not to complete fully recognised VET courses. Employment-related reasons (38% of total) were the most important factors influencing many men to discontinue their training in the VET sector, followed by factors related to training (30%) and those related to other personal reasons (24%). More women, on the other hand, reported that they ceased their VET training for personal reasons (33% of total, as compared to 29% for employment reasons and 30% for training reasons). Among those who discontinued their VET training for a range of personal reasons, the women were more likely than the men to leave the VET sector for family reasons.

Table 8: Reasons indicated by module completers for not continuing with training program, by sex, 2000

Reasons for not continuing to study	Females	Males	Persons
Employment-related reasons	*29.3*	*37.8*	*33.5*
Change job or started a new job	11.3	13.1	12.2
I lost my job	8.4	9.8	9.0
I got the skills I needed for my job	5.6	8.8	7.3
Other employment reasons	4.0	6.0	5.0
Training-related reasons	*29.9*	*30.0*	*30.0*
I had gained what I wanted from the training I had just completed	13.3	14.1	13.8
I transferred to or started other training	3.7	2.7	3.2
The training no longer related to my plans	3.4	4.3	3.8
The training was not what I expected	3.8	3.3	3.6
The training timetable was not flexible enough for me to attend	2.5	2.4	2.4
Other training reasons	3.3	3.2	3.2
Personal reasons	*33.2*	*23.6*	*28.4*
I moved from the area	1.8	1.2	1.5
Illness prevented me from continuing	3.3	2.3	2.8
Family reasons prevented me from continuing	8.5	2.5	5.6
Financial reasons prevented me from continuing	4.0	3.8	3.9
There were too many pressures on my time	11.1	9.2	10.1
Other personal reasons	4.5	4.6	4.5
Any other major reasons	*7.6*	*8.6*	*8.1*
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Men and women across the various age groups reported different reasons for discontinuing their studies (refer to tables 9 and 10).

A large proportion of young men in the 15 to 24 years age group choose to discontinue their VET training because they have changed their jobs or started new ones. Males aged 25 years and over generally cease training in the VET sector because they have already gained what they wanted from the training.

Males in the 15 to 19 years age group are also more likely than their older counterparts to discontinue their training because they have transferred to, or started, other training programs. In addition, they were also more inclined to believe that the training was no longer related to their plans.

For females as with males, training-related reasons for discontinuation subsume employment-related reasons as we move into the older age brackets. Women in the 15 to 34 years age group commonly leave VET training because they have changed their job, started a new job or lost their job (refer to table 10). Women aged 35 years and older are relatively more likely than those in the 15 to 34 years age group to discontinue their VET studies because they have gained what they wanted from the training.

Table 9: Reasons given by male module completers for discontinuing studies, by age, 2000

Male	15–19 yrs	20–24 yrs	25–34 yrs	35–44 yrs	45–54 yrs	55+ yrs	Total
Employment-related reasons (1)	*36.4*	*43.2*	*38.0*	*38.2*	*32.5*	*35.1*	***37.8***
Change jobs or started a new job	19.0	20.7	11.4	9.3	8.0	2.0	**13.1**
I lost my job	8.7	7.7	8.9	11.7	8.6	17.5	**9.8**
I got the skills I needed for my job	3.4	8.9	12.1	10.5	8.8	9.4	**8.8**
Other employment reasons	5.3	5.8	5.6	6.7	7.1	6.2	**6.0**
Training-related reasons (1)	*32.6*	*26.9*	*27.7*	*28.2*	*34.7*	*34.5*	***30.0***
I had gained what I wanted from the training I had just completed	8.3	7.9	14.6	16.8	20.8	25.1	**14.1**
I transferred to or started other training	5.6	4.7	1.3	2.0	0.5	0.2	**2.7**
The training no longer related to my plans	9.4	4.8	2.3	1.3	3.9	4.1	**4.3**
The training was not what I expected	5.5	3.1	2.8	1.7	3.3	3.2	**3.3**
The training timetable was not flexible enough for me to attend	0.5	2.9	4.3	3.3	1.8	0.2	**2.4**
Other training reasons, e.g. changes to training structure	3.3	3.6	2.4	3.2	4.4	1.6	**3.2**
Personal reasons (1)	*17.9*	*22.3*	*26.2*	*28.1*	*23.7*	*22.2*	***23.6***
I moved from the area	1.5	1.7	1.6	0.4	0.4	1.8	**1.2**
Illness prevented me from continuing	1.2	1.0	1.0	2.0	4.6	8.4	**2.3**
Family reasons prevented me from continuing	0.7	1.8	4.2	3.7	3.1	0.1	**2.5**
Financial reasons prevented my continuing	2.8	5.3	3.6	5.7	1.9	1.1	**3.8**
There were too many pressures on my time	6.0	7.7	11.5	10.7	12.5	4.4	**9.2**
Other personal reasons	5.6	4.8	4.3	5.5	1.2	6.4	**4.6**
Any other major reason (1)	*13.1*	*7.6*	*8.1*	*5.5*	*9.0*	*8.2*	***8.6***
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Note: (1) Given the relatively small total sample of module completers, figures in bold (reasons by age) are much more reliable statistically than other cell figures, which should only be taken as possible or general indications of sub-reasons by age

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Women in all age groups are more likely than the men to discontinue for personal reasons. Women in the 25 to 34 years age group are more likely than women from other age groups to leave VET training because of family matters.

Table 10: Reasons given by female module completers for discontinuing studies, by age, 2000

Female	15–19 yrs	20–24 yrs	25–34 yrs	35–44 yrs	45–54 yrs	55+ yrs	Total
Employment-related reasons (1)	*30.0*	*29.8*	*32.3*	*32.0*	*23.4*	*19.2*	***29.3***
Change jobs or started a new job	15.9	15.2	11.9	9.5	7.0	4.4	**11.3**
I lost my job	7.1	7.7	11.3	9.7	4.3	8.0	**8.4**
I got the skills I needed for my job	3.7	3.7	5.3	8.9	5.4	3.8	**5.6**
Other employment reasons	3.3	3.1	3.7	3.9	6.6	3.1	**4.0**
Training-related reasons (1)	*38.2*	*26.3*	*22.3*	*25.4*	*37.7*	*40.3*	***29.9***
I had gained what I wanted from the training I had just completed	10.8	6.7	8.6	13.2	23.9	26.3	**13.3**
I transferred to or started other training	8.3	6.8	1.5	2.2	1.6	1.2	**3.7**
The training no longer related to my plans	7.5	4.2	2.1	1.8	3.6	0.1	**3.4**
The training was not what I expected	6.0	3.1	3.9	2.9	3.0	4.9	**3.8**
The training timetable was not flexible enough for me to attend	1.7	3.3	3.3	1.8	1.8	4.4	**2.5**
Other training reasons, e.g. changes to training structure	3.9	2.2	2.9	3.5	3.8	3.5	**3.3**
Personal reasons (1)	*22.3*	*35.2*	*38.7*	*35.2*	*32.4*	*34.3*	***33.2***
I moved from the area	1.5	2.1	3.5	1.2	0.3	3.1	**1.8**
Illness prevented me from continuing	2.8	5.3	0.5	4.2	4.1	3.9	**3.3**
Family reasons prevented me from continuing	4.3	8.2	14.7	8.7	7.4	2.9	**8.5**
Financial reasons prevented my continuing	2.2	4.2	6.0	4.3	3.7	0.7	**4.0**
There were too many pressures on my time	7.8	9.5	9.8	13.5	12.3	14.9	**11.1**
Other personal reasons	3.8	5.9	4.2	3.3	4.6	8.7	**4.5**
Any other major reason (1)	*9.5*	*8.8*	*6.7*	*7.3*	*6.5*	*6.2*	***7.6***
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Note: (1) Given the relatively small total sample of module completers, figures in bold (reasons by age) are much more reliable statistically than other cell figures, which should only be taken as possible or general indications of sub-reasons by age

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Summary

The majority of VET students, whether they be graduates or module completers, undertake VET training for vocational or work-related reasons, as opposed to non-vocational reasons. Graduates (77% of total) cite these motives more frequently than module completers (65% of total). Where vocational or work-related reasons are cited, the most common individual reason for graduates (and younger module completers) is to get a job or own a business, whereas that for module completers generally is to get extra skills for the current job.

Motives for discontinuing training appear to be related to employment events rather than the adequacy or otherwise of VET programs. On the whole, students leave for

employment-related reasons (having gained or lost a job or acquired the skills for the job) rather than training or personal-related reasons.

The dominance of the employment motive differs a little between the sexes. For males, the motives are 38% employment, 30% training and 24% personal; whereas for females they are 29%, 30% and 33% respectively.

For both males and females, the younger age groups tend to discontinue studies more for employment-related reasons, whereas the older age groups (25 years and over, or 35 years and over in the case of females) begin to discontinue their studies because they have got what they wanted from the training, or their training plans have changed.

Employment and related outcomes for VET module students

One of the key performance measures (KPMs) of the VET sector is that of student vocational outcomes following the completion of training. To gain a better understanding of the vocational outcomes achieved by module completers, the student outcomes survey seeks information about students' employment status before commencing training and after completion of training.

On the whole, the majority of module completers believe that their training program has helped them achieve the goal that had led them to choose to undertake training in the VET sector. Of those who indicated that they chose VET training for vocational or work-related reasons, just over two thirds indicated that they had or partly had achieved their goal.

The extent to which module completers believe that VET training has helped them to achieve their goal varies, depending on their particular reasons for choosing their training program. Just under 90% of module completers, who indicated that they chose their VET training program to assist them with performing their job, believed that their training program had helped them to achieve their goal (refer to table 11). Where module completers indicated that they had chosen their VET training program to assist them to gain a job or a different career, they were less likely (49% and 42% respectively) to agree that their training program had helped them to achieve their goal.

Table 11: The effectiveness of VET training programs in helping vocationally oriented module completers to achieve their goals, 2000

	Yes/partly	No	Don't know yet	Total
To get a job (or own business)	49.3	35.8	14.9	**100.0**
To try for a different career	41.5	34.8	23.7	**100.0**
To get a better job or promotion	55.7	28.6	15.7	**100.0**
It was a requirement of my job	88.5	7.9	3.6	**100.0**
I wanted extra skills for my job	87.1	7.2	5.7	**100.0**
Vocational-related reasons	*67.0*	*21.4*	*11.7*	***100.0***

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Employment outcomes

Information on the employment status of module completers, six months before commencement of their training and six months after, is shown in table 12.

As was noted in the first chapter, about 71% of module completers are found to be in employment after six months, a result that compares quite favourably to that for TAFE graduates (76%).

Module completers who were employed before training generally remain employed following the completion of their training from the VET sector. Specifically, students in full-time employment before training predominantly remain employed full time six months after VET training. A small percentage of module completers employed before training are found to be unemployed, or out of the labour force, after training.

A quarter of those employed on a part-time basis before training have found full-time employment after completing their VET training. Of these individuals, about a quarter have found full-time employment with the same employer.

A significant result is that approximately 40% of module completers who were unemployed before commencement of their training have gained employment six months following the completion of their training. Of these individuals, about 22% had obtained full-time employment and 18% part-time employment.

About 30% of module completers who indicate that they were not in the labour force before training are employed after completing their VET training. Of those who gain employment, about half are full-time workers and the remainder part time.

Table 12: Employment status of module completers before and after training, 2000

	After training					
Before training	Employed—FT	Employed—PT	Employed	Unemployed	Not in the labour force	**Total**
Employed	*61.2*	*25.4*	*88.4*	*5.6*	*6.0*	***100.0***
Employed—FT	83.4	6.6	91.1	4.1	4.8	**100.0**
Employed—PT	25.4	57.8	84.5	7.7	7.7	**100.0**
Unemployed	*21.9*	*18.0*	*41.1*	*40.8*	*18.1*	***100.0***
Not in the labour force	*15.2*	*14.8*	*30.8*	*16.7*	*52.6*	***100.0***
Total	**47.2**	**22.4**	**71.1**	**12.5**	**16.4**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Industry of employment

During 2000, the industries that employed most Australians and also most module completers were retail trade, manufacturing, property and business services, and health and community services.

The distribution of employed module completers across the major industry divisions strongly resembles that of the general working population (refer to table 13).

With a few minor variations, the same is true when completers in full-time employment are compared to the full-time workforce generally, and when those in part-time employment are compared to the part-time workforce generally.

Table 13: Employed module completers and the general workforce, by industry of employment, 2000

	FT workers		PT workers		Total	
	Module completers	General workforce	Module completers	General workforce	Module completers	General workforce
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	5.5	5.0	2.9	4.4	4.7	4.9
Mining	1.8	1.1	0.1	0.1	1.3	0.8
Manufacturing	16.2	15.8	4.4	5.5	12.4	13.0
Electricity, gas and water supply	1.5	1.0	0.4	0.2	1.1	0.7
Construction	9.4	9.2	2.3	4.0	7.2	7.8
Wholesale trade	2.5	5.6	1.0	2.8	2.0	4.9
Retail trade	11.8	10.9	29.6	25.0	17.5	14.6
Accommodation, cafes and restaurants	4.6	3.6	10.6	8.7	6.5	5.0
Transport and storage	4.3	5.4	2.4	2.6	3.7	4.6
Communication services	2.0	2.4	1.0	0.9	1.7	2.0
Finance and insurance	3.1	4.2	1.5	2.5	2.6	3.7
Property and business services	11.3	11.9	8.2	9.8	10.3	11.3
Government administration and defence	5.9	4.6	1.9	1.8	4.6	3.8
Education	5.6	6.1	12.3	8.8	7.8	6.8
Health and community services	8.7	7.6	15.3	14.7	10.8	9.5
Cultural and recreational services	2.5	1.9	3.1	3.8	2.7	2.4
Personal and other services	3.2	3.7	3.2	4.2	3.2	3.9
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Australian Labour Force May 2000*, catalogue number 6223.0
NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Occupations of module completers

The industries employing module completers strongly resemble those found in the general working population. The occupations of employed module completers also resemble, although less strongly, those found in the general working population.

Most Australian workers during May 2000 were employed as professionals, intermediate clerical, sales and service workers, and tradespersons and related workers.

The occupations of module completers and of the general working population are shown, by employment status, in table 14. Compared to the general working population, employed module completers are a little less likely to be professional or technical workers and a little more likely to be in trades or elementary clerical, sales and service occupations.

Module completers working full time are more likely to be employed as tradespersons, intermediate clerical, sales and service, and labourers or related workers, than the general working population. Module completers working part time are more likely than the rest of the part-time working population to be elementary clerical, sales and service workers.

Table 14: Employed module completers and the general workforce, by occupation, 2000

	FT workers		PT workers		Total	
	Module completers	General workforce	Module completers	General workforce	Module completers	General workforce
Managers and administrators	8.9	8.6	3.0	2.7	7.0	7.0
Professionals	14.2	19.8	13.9	13.9	14.1	18.2
Technicians and associate professionals	10.5	13.4	4.5	5.2	8.5	11.2
Tradespersons and related workers	21.6	16.6	6.3	4.3	16.6	13.3
Advanced clerical and service workers	4.2	3.5	5.1	6.7	4.5	4.3
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers	17.0	14.8	24.9	25.1	19.5	17.5
Intermediate production and transport workers	8.0	10.3	2.2	5.2	6.1	8.9
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	6.4	5.1	27.0	22.3	13.0	9.7
Labourers and related workers	9.3	7.9	13.2	14.6	10.6	9.7
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Sources: ABS, *Australian Labour Force May 2000*, catalogue number 6223.0
NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Other employment indicators

This section further assesses the outcomes achieved by module completers who remain with the same employer throughout, and by those who achieve employment having previously been unemployed.

Benefits for module completers who retain the same employer

Module completers employed by the *same* employer before, during and after VET training are twice as likely as others to have their tuition fees paid by the employer (table 15). These individuals are also more likely to receive other benefits such as paid time off work. Overall, nearly 50% of the first group have fees paid or receive time off on pay, compared to nearly 30% of the second group.

Table 15: Employer support for module completers while undertaking VET modules, 2000

	Same employer before, during and after training		
Employer support	Yes	No	**Total**
Paid fees	30.1	15.8	**27.1**
Paid time off work	19.0	12.4	**17.6**
Unpaid time off work	3.3	6.9	**4.0**
Other support	5.3	1.4	**4.5**
No support	36.5	54.8	**40.3**
Not stated	6.0	8.7	**6.5**
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

At six months following the completion of their VET training, some 95% of module completers who were employed by the same employer before, during and after training report that the level of skills required for their job remains unchanged. Less than 5% indicate that they have moved to a higher skill-level job following the completion of training.

Almost 60% of module completers who were employed by the same employer before, during and after training believe that there are no benefits in undertaking VET training. Of the 40% who indicate that they gained at least one benefit from completing VET training, almost half indicate that there has been job advancement such as a promotion, increased status at work or increased earnings (refer to table 16).

Following the completion of their training in the VET sector, only 5% of module completers employed by the same employer before, during and after their training have actually experienced any changes to their occupation or moved to a different industry of employment.

Table 16: Module completers who benefit from undertaking VET modules, by type of benefit, 2000

At least one benefit	Number of module completers	Proportion of module completers (%)
Got a job	1 468	6.5
An increase in earnings	4 765	21.0
A promotion (or increased status at work)	5 844	25.8
Change of job	2 331	10.3
Other	8 276	36.5
Total	**22 684**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Unemployed module completers finding jobs after training

Following the completion of their training in the VET sector, approximately 40% of module completers who indicated that they were unemployed before commencement of training have found employment, with some 22% reporting full-time employment. The remaining 60% (refer to table 12) remain unemployed or out of the labour force.

As a rough comparison, the experiences of unemployed people who complete modules (40% in jobs after six months) appear reasonably favourable against the experiences of 6–12 months unemployed people who undertake intensive Job Search Training through the national Job Network, managed by the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB). The Department's *Annual report: 2000–2001* (DEWRSB 2001) indicates that about 50% of these individuals are in jobs *or education* three months after finishing assistance.

Other unpublished student outcomes survey 2000 data indicate that, generally, unemployed module completers finding full-time employment take less time to find their jobs than those finding part-time employment.

Unemployed module completers finding full-time employment are generally more likely to believe that their training is relevant to their current employment than those finding part-time employment (refer to table 17). Almost a third of those in full-time employment indicate that their training was highly relevant to their employment. However, more than half of those in part-time employment report that their training was not *at all* relevant to their employment.

Table 17: Relevance of training to module completers' current employment, 2000

	Employment status after VET training		
	Employed full time	Employed part time	**Total**
Highly relevant	31.3	13.8	**22.8**
Some relevance	24.2	20.9	**22.6**
Very little relevance	15.0	14.0	**14.4**
Not at all relevant	29.6	51.3	**40.1**
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Industry and occupation

Other unpublished student outcomes survey 2000 data may be used to examine the industry and occupation characteristics of previously unemployed module completers who gain employment.

Unemployed module completers finding employment on completion of their training are employed in different industries to those already employed before commencement of their VET training. While module completers in employment before training are most commonly employed in the 'manufacturing' industry, about a quarter of unemployed module completers who find employment following VET training are working in the 'retail trade' industry. Individuals employed full time after training primarily work in 'manufacturing' and 'property and business services', while those in part-time employment are predominantly employed in the 'retail trade' industry.

Module completers employed by the same employer throughout predominantly work as 'managers and administrators', 'professional' or 'technicians and associate professional'. Unemployed module completers finding employment after training are more likely to be employed as 'elementary clerical, sales and service workers', 'labourers and related workers', or 'intermediate production and transport workers'.

Unemployed module completers finding full-time employment after training are more likely to be employed as 'tradespersons and related workers' than those in part-time employment. These individuals are also more inclined to be working as 'intermediate production and transport workers'. Unemployed module completers finding part-time employment are more likely than those obtaining full-time employment to work as 'elementary clerical, sales and service workers'.

Training satisfaction

Although individuals who participate in VET training are generally satisfied with the overall quality of the training, module completers are a little less likely than TAFE graduates to be satisfied. Tables 18 and 19 show the levels of satisfaction with various aspects of the VET sector given by module completers and TAFE graduates respectively.

A large proportion of module completers and TAFE graduates indicate that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with certain aspects of the VET sector. Specifically, about half report that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with student support services. However, module completers were more likely than TAFE graduates to be dissatisfied with student support services.

Module completers were more likely than TAFE graduates to be dissatisfied with certain aspects of the VET sector such as the usefulness of the training for job prospects, (unsurprisingly) employers' regard for the qualification, and the training value for money. TAFE graduates were less likely than module completers to be satisfied with the presentation of training material and the quality of the equipment provided to practise skills. These individuals were also less likely to be satisfied with the handling of administration (enquiries, enrolment, fee payments and results).

Table 18: Module completers' levels of satisfaction with VET training, 2000

Module completers	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Total
Teaching, instruction				
Your instructor's knowledge of subject content	72.9	2.0	25.1	**100.0**
Your instructor's ability to relate to students	63.0	4.2	32.8	**100.0**
The balance between instruction and practice	54.6	5.1	40.3	**100.0**
Making methods of assessment clear to you	59.0	5.1	36.0	**100.0**
The training				
The subject content in reflecting industry practice	55.5	4.3	40.2	**100.0**
The presentation of training material	55.8	4.5	39.7	**100.0**
The equipment and resources				
The quality of the equipment provided for you to practise your skills	56.9	5.7	37.5	**100.0**
Having enough equipment for you to practise your skills	58.0	5.9	36.1	**100.0**
Access to library and learning resources	64.0	4.7	31.3	**100.0**
Access				
The convenience of both venue and class times	59.4	5.2	35.4	**100.0**
Administration and information				
The information you received when choosing your training	49.7	6.8	43.4	**100.0**
Administration—handling of enquiries, enrolment, fee payment, results	51.6	7.9	40.5	**100.0**
Student support services				
The information about careers and jobs available to you	37.5	13.9	48.5	**100.0**
Student counselling services	35.6	15.4	49.1	**100.0**
The overall opinions				
The usefulness of the training for your job prospects	51.7	6.8	41.4	**100.0**
The qualification in terms of being well-regarded by employers	48.4	6.7	44.9	**100.0**
The training value for money	55.9	7.3	36.8	**100.0**
Overall quality				
The overall quality of the training	62.8	4.1	33.1	**100.0**

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Table 19: TAFE graduates' levels of satisfaction with VET training, 2000

TAFE graduates	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Total
Teaching, instruction				
Your instructor's knowledge of subject content	72.2	1.3	26.6	**100.0**
Your instructor's ability to relate to students	61.8	2.6	35.6	**100.0**
The balance between instruction and practice	54.8	3.1	42.0	**100.0**
Making methods of assessment clear to you	60.1	3.2	36.7	**100.0**
The training				
The subject content in reflecting industry practice	56.8	3.1	40.0	**100.0**
The presentation of training material	34.3	2.1	63.6	**100.0**
The equipment and resources				
The quality of the equipment provided for you to practise your skills	52.0	5.4	42.6	**100.0**
Having enough equipment for you to practise your skills	49.7	6.5	43.8	**100.0**
Access to library and learning resources	63.3	4.2	32.5	**100.0**
Access				
The convenience of both venue and class times	60.3	3.8	35.8	**100.0**
Administration and information				
The information you received when choosing your training	49.3	5.2	45.4	**100.0**
Administration—handling of enquiries, enrolment, fee payment, results	48.6	8.4	43.1	**100.0**
Student support services				
The information about careers and jobs available to you	37.5	11.1	51.4	**100.0**
Student counselling services	37.5	11.6	50.9	**100.0**
The overall opinions				
The usefulness of the training for your job prospects	61.5	3.7	34.8	**100.0**
The qualification in terms of being well-regarded by employers	57.7	4.2	38.2	**100.0**
The training value for money	60.7	4.6	34.7	**100.0**
Overall quality				
The overall quality of the training	66.7	2.4	31.0	**100.0**

Source: NCVER, unpublished statistics from 2000 student outcomes survey

Summary

As is the case with TAFE graduates, a considerable majority (71%) of module completers is found to be in employment six months after completion.

An indicator of the potential labour market 'boost' of modular study is that some 40% of individuals unemployed before training have found employment after six months, as have some 30% of individuals who were not in the labour force at all. As it happens, the 40% statistic compares quite reasonably to the 50% success rate in getting unemployed people into jobs or education through the Job Network.

It is also notable that VET modular study appears to be having an impact across the Australian labour market generally, not being confined or restricted to limited or narrow industry, occupational or skill categories. Generally speaking, module completers are employed in very similar proportions across the major industries and occupations to the rest of the general working population. There is a slight tendency (only) for module completers to be a little more concentrated in sales, service and trades than the general working population, a little less concentrated in professional and associate professional levels.

On average, employed module completers who are with the same employer before, during and after training get much better employer support than those who are not. Even then, only 50% of these have fees paid or have paid time off work.

For those staying with the same employer, there appear to be moderate rather than outstanding job benefits, perhaps indicating elements of self-improvement as well as career aspiration in employees' module study. Very few of these employees move to a higher skill job, and less than half (40%) indicate some form of job advancement such as higher status or earnings.

There is some evidence that where module students are employed as opposed to unemployed before commencing study, modular study is servicing slightly different industries. Manufacturing is the most commonly occurring industry for the former group; retail is the most commonly occurring (destination) industry for the latter.

Finally, it appears that at the margin, module completers are slightly less satisfied with the VET service than TAFE graduates. Different aspects of the service (e.g. student support, improvement in job prospects, and training value for money) are a little more likely to displease them than to displease graduates.

Case studies of VET module students

Data available from the national VET statistics collections and from the 1999–2000 student outcomes surveys provide useful insights into the characteristics of, and outcomes for, individuals who chose to study VET by modules only.

The following chapter builds on this benchmark information through the conduct of face-to-face case studies of groups of students who chose to study by modules. Extra information has been derived from five focus group discussions of students undertaking VET modules at TAFE institutes in New South Wales (2), South Australia (2) and the Australian Capital Territory.

The case study format (refer to Appendix B) seeks information to test and amplify the course satisfaction and job outcome findings that have emerged from the 1999 and 2000 student outcomes surveys. It has also been anticipated that the information will provide a better understanding of the role of VET in lifelong learning.

New South Wales

Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE—welding and metal fabrication group

This case study is based on the responses of nine male TAFE students in a focus group at Southern Sydney TAFE. Except for one high school student and one Centrelink customer, all students involved in the focus group were employed workers.

All students in the group indicated that they could not enrol in a full course and were offered a series of modules instead. At the time of enrolment, they were advised of the appropriate modules. Some were studying several modules simultaneously. All students were to receive a Statement of Attainment upon completion of their modules.

The modules covered welding and metal fabrication. In all, about five different modules were being undertaken. Three of the nine students indicated that their employers (or, in one case, Centrelink) were paying for their study. The others were paying their own fees.

Various reasons were given for studying via modules. One student, a second-year apprentice, was a 'module' student by virtue of undertaking two extra welding modules at his employer's request in addition to his 'enrolled' apprentice fitting and machining studies. Two were studying under formal obligation, to an employer and to

Centrelink respectively. The school student, a prospective university enrollee, was taking a welding module to broaden skills and experience. The other five were using modules to enhance skills and experience for their existing jobs.

Students' backgrounds tended to validate their use of modules to enhance their employment situations and capabilities, rather than as a concentrated vocational program. One, an owner of a welding supply company, wanted more knowledge for his communications with practising welders. One wanted welding skills as an adjunct to his rigger's ticket. Four engineering or construction company employees saw welding skills as enhancing their skills and prospects generally. The other was a fitting apprentice wanting to broaden his skill base.

Students felt that module study enabled them to be more selective about options than full-course study. 'I don't want to have to do a long course,' commented one, 'I want to pick out what I want to use.' 'I could learn a lot more if a did a whole welding course,' said another, 'but because I only need to know MIG[3] welding I just came to this (module).' However, there were also disadvantages. All students were concerned about receiving a Statement of Attainment rather than a certificate. They were uncertain of the Statement's value to employers, compared to a certificate. They saw this as detracting some value from modules for the purposes of obtaining employment, promotion or increase in wages.

Students saw enrolment in a course as providing a sense of continuity. Modules, being more discrete, tended to make studies disjointed. These concerns were supported by lecturers, who indicated that many employers would prefer students to undertake training in the traditional block-study format rather than by modules.

All students felt that the modules offered useful gains in knowledge and in skills relevant to industry. Despite their concerns, they hoped completion of the module would lead to job advancement and increased wages.

Four students indicated they would be likely to enrol in further modules upon completion of their current study. Another four were tentative, preferring to await the outcome of their current study. As might have been expected, the fitting apprentice did not expect to enrol in further (welding) modules.

Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE—fitting and machining group

The focus group in this case study comprised six Southern Sydney TAFE students, all males studying fitting and machining modules. All students were employed. Three of the students were paying their own training fees. Employers were paying training fees for the remainder of the group.

With regard to preferences for full-course versus module study, one student would have preferred to enrol in a full course but full-time employment prevented this. The remaining five were satisfied with study by modules. One of these intended to review

---

[3] The term MIG stands for 'metal inert gas'.

his module achievements and use them towards a qualification to be obtained through recognition of current competency (RCC).

When asked to specify reasons for choosing particular modules, the four who responded indicated that the main reason for their selection was to assist with their jobs. Flexibility was another advantage that students saw in studying by modules. It made study more attractive by allowing them to select subject areas and times suited to their needs. No students reported any disadvantages in studying in this way.

Students were divided as to whether the content of the modules would meet the needs of their employers. However, they were unanimous in their belief that the training was according to industry standards.

All students saw completion of their modules as contributing to their training goals. Four students indicated completion of modules would improve their employment status and two of these anticipated higher grades or increased pay. The other two students in the group were uncertain about employment outcomes.

All of the students indicated they would be inclined to become 'repeat customers' and undertake further module study.

South Australia

Regency Institute of TAFE

This case study is based on the responses of five TAFE students (four females and one male) from different TAFE classes. Three were employed, two of them full time, the other part time. Of the two who were unemployed, one had not been in employment for a period of four years preceding her course (she was caring for her young children) and the other for a preceding period of six months.

Modules of study included advanced word-processing, spreadsheets, databases, e-mail, MYOB (Mind Your Own Business) software, travel, note-taking, and study for an international computer licence.

For the two students in full-time employment, the employer paid fees provided that the modules being undertaken were related to their work. The part-time employed student and the two who were unemployed paid their own fees. One unemployed student commented that fees were surprisingly low.

Various reasons were given for choosing to enrol for one or a few modules rather than a whole course—most related to other commitments. For two of the students, the flexibility of modules allowed them to continue usual employment while studying. For another, this flexibility allowed her to combine study with raising a family. One student with a previous qualification was undertaking modules on an occasional basis to build on previous study. Two students saw module study as an opportunity to 'test the water', being unsure of their ability to cope with study (one gave this reason in addition to flexibility of study).

All students in the focus group were undertaking their study for employment-related reasons. Two of the three who were currently employed were studying to upgrade skills used in their jobs; the third was expecting her study to assist in seeking formal recognition of skills she already had. Of the two unemployed students, one was hoping to maintain and update skills to be ready to re-enter the workforce when her children were older. The other had failed in business due to lack of accounting knowledge, and was seeking better accounting skills for future business ventures.

Advantages of module study, as opposed to full-course study, were said to be that:

- modules focused on exactly what students wanted (whereas in full-course study some topics were peripheral to needs)
- by concentrating on just one topic, students were able to perform better and cope with the combinations of study, work and family commitments
- students could devote more time to project work out of class time (an activity which formed a substantial part of their studies)
- it was cheaper to enrol for a single module than a course
- study by module was less stressful

Disadvantages of module study were:

- if a student elected to study a course by modules, it could take longer
- friendships and interaction with other students were more limited, with fewer opportunities for contact than for those undertaking a series of classes

All students saw the modules they were studying as a relevant and significant contribution to their training goals. They felt the modules were giving them knowledge and skills that would be valued by an employer. All hoped that completion of their modules would contribute to their job prospects.

Four of the five students indicated they would be likely to undertake further VET study upon completion of the modules they were currently undertaking. The student who was employed part time was more tentative, suggesting that she would first wait to see how she fared in her present study.

The students were invited to comment on their levels of satisfaction with the quality of instruction and administration associated with their modules. Taken overall, they were highly satisfied with the teaching, the relevance and usefulness of the module content, the equipment used for training, access to study, administration and course information provision, and student support services.

Only two students gave indications of dissatisfaction. One felt there was insufficient explanation of assessment. Another was initially unhappy with the manner in which training was delivered. He was unable to get help from the trainer, because he was surrounded by students who 'knew it all'. This situation was remedied, by relocating him in the classroom with students who had a similar level of knowledge.

Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE

This case study is based on a focus group of nine male and four female students in a large TAFE institute in South Australia. All students were in the third week of an eight-week business studies module, on marketing, which required attendance of two

and one half hours per week. Three students were also studying, or had studied, one or more other modules; namely, business finance (2 students), cost, profit and break-even (2), planning for success (1) and business law (1).

Ages were spread, two persons being in their early twenties and two in their fifties. Ten of the students were employed; most of them full time. One of these was studying marketing as an optional component of his training in dental technology. Of the three who were not employed, two were female students with home-based commitments and the third was a male in his 50s who, having left his boilermaker job six years previously for medical reasons, was undertaking the module as part of his retraining.

Only two of the students were not paying their own fees. With one, the fees were paid by his company (which he actually managed), and for the other (the ex-boilermaker) the fees were paid by the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service (CRS). Four of the students were under some form of obligation to study. The ex-boilermaker was studying the module as part of a rehabilitation program, the dental technology student was taking it as a component of his course, and two electricians were required to undertake it as part of a program to upgrade their electrical contracting licences.

All but one of the students in the focus group identified specific vocational reasons for undertaking the marketing module. Eight saw it as being applicable to, or having potential application in, their existing employment. Four others saw marketing as being of value in starting up their own businesses, a significant career change for some. The other person, a carpenter, saw it as a form of self-improvement of later application in some, as yet, unknown context outside his present work.

When asked to nominate advantages of study by module, all students included the concept of flexibility in their responses. 'Flexibility' they identified as:

- the ability to choose topics specific to one's needs—to do exactly as desired and, conversely, to avoid unnecessary areas of study
- greater ease of integrating study with other scheduled private and work activities
- ability to break study into easy stages

Other advantages were:

- ability to tailor study to ability to pay—making it easier to 'pay as you go', as one put it
- less intimidating nature of study by module—it did not seem as big a commitment as enrolment in a full course
- study by module was a good starting point—particularly for students unsure of the subject or how they would handle it

The only disadvantage cited was the past experience of some students in modules, which attempted to cover too much in the relatively short time available.

Students generally did not see completion of the module as offering any immediate financial benefit or advancement in their job. However, most felt that what they were learning would be valued by an employer in the right circumstances, and could be of benefit in the future.

Five students were able to say with reasonable certainty they would undertake further modules of study and another five remained open to the possibility. The two

electricians did not expect to undertake any further modules after completing those required for licence upgrade.

In their closing comments, several students (male and female) were critical of the lack of childcare in the evenings—when modules were normally offered. Although this criticism was not directly related to the concept of study by modules, it was seen to detract from the flexibility that module study was said to offer. For two students, both women with children, this deficiency could have been remedied by offering modules in the daytime. However, daytime study was not a practicable option for others.

In summary, the students in this group strongly preferred enrolment and study by modules as opposed to courses. They particularly liked the flexibility and focus of modules. Although most did not see the outcome of the particular module being studied as having any immediate application in their current jobs, nearly all believed it was relevant to the world of work and helpful in relation to their career aspirations.

Australian Capital Territory

Canberra Institute of Technology

The following case study is based on the responses of five module students from the Canberra Institute of Technology. These students were undertaking an accounting module in the MYOB (Mind Your Own Business) software.

Three students were employed, one was self-employed and another was seeking employment. Two of the five students, both in the employed group, were males.

All five students had chosen to study by modules voluntarily. One student was undertaking the module to gain a general understanding of the area, another was hoping to gain appropriate knowledge to assist her in running a private business. The remaining three were serving police officers seeking a better understanding of the MYOB accounting system to help them with their (fraud) work.

All five students paid for their own training fees. The three employed students were commended by their employer for undertaking the module and given time off work for training. The self-employed student paid for her training fee from her own company's training program, set up to meet an ACT government requirement.

Students had chosen to study by modules rather than a full course, because the module provided them with the specific knowledge required. The self-employed student indicated that she could not commit herself to a full course because she already had major family and work commitments. The unemployed student was concurrently undertaking a bachelor's degree in social sciences and the module was an added subject. The three employed students reported that they had chosen to study by module rather than by full course because the module gave them the skills and knowledge applicable to their current employment situation.

Overall, four out of five students reported that they were involved in their modules directly for employment-related reasons. The self-employed student indicated that she hoped to gain part-time employment following the completion of her training. The

three employed students indicated that their module would give them work-based skills and opportunities for self-improvement. Although the unemployed student was not seeking direct assistance with finding employment, he had decided to study by modules because of previous positive experience with this form of study.

All five students reported that the greatest advantages of studying by modules were the flexibility that this allowed and the time commitment that was involved. As the students were at an early stage of the module, it was too early for them to identify any disadvantages of that form of study. However, they believed that the module in which they had enrolled would contribute significantly to their training goals.

The three employed students indicated that the module would help them with their current position, while the self-employed student commented that the module would help her with her own business and perhaps to gain part-time employment. The unemployed student believed that the module would give her a better understanding of the accounting system, which she could apply to future volunteering positions. In previous social welfare jobs, she had found it frustrating that only the appointed experts were able to manipulate the organisation's accounting systems 'black box' sufficiently well to pull out simple financial statistics.

All five students would consider undertaking more modules in the future. Two students indicated that they would consider the next level (MYOB) module while the remaining three were unsure of the module in which they would subsequently enrol.

Summary

The case studies cover five TAFE institutes. Two were in New South Wales, two in South Australia and one in the Australian Capital Territory. The modules being studied in the five groups were welding and metal fabrication, fitting and machining, mixed accounting and clerical, marketing, and accounting (the MYOB package).

There was a grand total of 38 students who provided researchers with information. The total included 27 males and 11 females. A preponderance of these were younger men and women in full-time employment, but were also some women and men in older age groups who were retraining to rejoin the workforce. In fact, 31 students were employed, six were unemployed and one was still at school.

In terms of sex, age, and employment status, the group is not that dissimilar to module students generally, the main difference being the greater preponderance of males than is found in the overall population of module students. In terms of areas of study, the sample is really too small to compare meaningfully to the areas of learning (refer to table 3) found in the overall population of module students.

Consistently across the five focus groups, the majority of students commented that they had chosen to study by modules for specific vocational reasons, to upgrade their skills or knowledge for work. This was consistent with the findings (refer to tables 6–8 earlier) of the student outcomes survey.

Employed students in the group discussions generally indicated that they had chosen their particular modules to gain appropriate skills, and to fill in identified skill gaps, to

help them perform in their jobs more efficiently. More often than not, employed students paid their own fees, with little objection to so doing.

A small number of unemployed students took part in the group discussions. In the main, these students had chosen their modules to update their skills to re-enter the labour force. In a couple of cases, the module represented a formal obligation to Centrelink or the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service.

A significant aspect of the case studies is the finding that, in general, module students choose to study modules for their greater flexibility in terms of study and time commitments, including primary business and educational commitments elsewhere. A number of these students reported that they were 'repeat customers', who had found that module study had met their personal needs on previous occasions. Others would be likely to become repeat customers in the future.

Flexibility of study enables students to focus on the course that is most apt for their needs, at reasonable cost, with a reasonable likelihood of success, and with less distraction from peripheral course elements. If used intelligently, module study breaks the study into stages that are more manageable in terms of the student's finances, aspirations, and degrees of confidence or competence.

The positive factors appear to outweigh student concerns such as the disjointed nature and social isolation of module study, the (possibly) lesser value of the Statement of Attainment to employers, and minor program delivery and assessment concerns. The flexibility of study and associated positive factors are consistent with, but go beyond, the current findings of the student outcomes survey. They are pointers to future research questions within the surveys and via other studies of modules.

Why do students choose modules as opposed to full courses?

Although students reported many reasons for choosing to study by modules as opposed to a full course, the flexibility of studying by modules was thought to be the most important factor. This flexibility has allowed students to meet other commitments, including employment and family matters, while they try out training in areas that interest them in the VET sector.

A small number of students also indicated that they were undertaking modules under obligation to employers, Centrelink, apprenticeships, or traineeships.

More so than a full-time course, VET by modules is relatively easy to fit in with other forms of study in other sectors of education. Thus, the case studies revealed module students whose major educational commitment was actually school education or study towards a university degree.

What are the advantages of studying by modules?

There are a number of advantages of undertaking training by modules. Students believed that studying by modules had allowed them to select the subject area of interest to them. The modules studied concentrate on one specific topic area and do not extend into topics peripheral to their needs. Furthermore, by concentrating on the

one topic, students are more confident they will be able to perform better and combine study with work or family commitments.

A number of students indicated that it was less stressful for them to study by modules. This is because they were given an opportunity to test their ability with less risk of major failure. Furthermore, students find it less expensive to study by modules as they could pay as they go.

Students are using modules to meet quite specific skill gaps that are related to previous employment experiences and future employment goals. Most of the 13 students in the marketing focus group thought that the program would be applicable to current employment or future business ventures. Two students from other groups were studying accounting because that area had been a weakness in a previous business venture or in a previous job. Three others in the MYOB group were doing similar accounting study to strengthen their arrays of skills for investigative (fraud) work.

In the welding group, the intelligent use of modules as an adjunct to students' primary business (owning a welding company) or employment (engineering and construction company employees, one rigger and one fitting apprentice) activities was of interest.

What are the disadvantages of studying by modules?

A number of students believed course enrolment provided a sense of continuity while module enrolment, being more discrete, tended to make studies disjointed. As a result, studying by modules limited the opportunities to establish friendships or social interactions. In addition, a number of students indicated that it would take them longer to complete their training should they later elect to complete a full course.

Students in one of the groups (welding and metal fabrication) were concerned about the value of the Statement of Attainment to be received on completion of their modules. These students believed employers do not view a Statement of Attainment as favourably as a VET certificate. Specifically, they felt that a Statement of Attainment would not help them with job advancement.

The uncertainty about the Statement of Attainment was, however, contradicted by another group of students undertaking training in similar occupations (fitting and machining). This group recognised a Statement of Attainment as a positive outcome that would allow them to gain higher grades and rewards, and improved job status.

Are modules meeting industry standards?

On the whole, and despite the mixed views on statements of attainment, students believed that the modules they were undertaking met industry standards. They indicated that the knowledge and skills gained were relevant to the needs of employers.

Many students also reported that their modules were relevant to their training goals and would subsequently assist them with their employment prospects.

Summary and conclusions

This chapter serves to summarise the policy and research environment for modules in VET, the characteristics and outcomes for module students, and the findings from the focus groups of module students. The final section provides conclusions and suggested actions.

Policy and research summary

The encouragement of lifelong learning, and of re-skilling and up-skilling, are major aims of the VET system. Greater recognition of the importance of 'module' enrolments, especially as arising from recent developments in the national VET strategy (ANTA 1998) and the work of the Performance Review Committee (ANTA 1999), gives practical effect to that aim.

The National VET Strategy for 1998–2003 (ANTA 1998) encourages registered training organisations to offer products and services that are tailored to the needs of industry and individuals, by developing opportunities for modular study, in addition to full program enrolments towards qualifications. Subsequently, this allows individuals with the desire for 'lifelong learning' to have more choice and flexible pathways for their learning.

The Performance Review Committee produced a series of key performance measures (KPMs) for VET, one being concerned with 'student employment outcomes and prospects before and after VET participation'. The introduction of KPM4, as it is known, has had an impact in raising the policy profile and the practical interest in modular study and its outcomes. The former TAFE graduate destination survey, as it was known, was modified in 1999 into a student outcomes survey that assesses the outcomes of both TAFE graduates and TAFE 'module completers', individuals who have finished part, but not all, of the training necessary to complete a full qualification.

Over recent years, modular study in the VET sector has been consistently popular. Of the 1.6 million students undertaking VET training in 1999, at least 40% were identified as having enrolled in just one or two modules (Dumbrell 2000). The percentages for 1998 and 1997 are similar. Also, the number of 'module completers' each year considerably exceeds the numbers of graduates. TAFE module students are fairly similar to graduates in their characteristics and, importantly, their employment outcomes on completion.

Apart from the kinds of indications available from the VET student enrolment and student outcome data, major research on module students is limited. Researchers such as Foyster, Fai and Shah (2000), Dumbrell (2000), and Dumbrell, de Montfort and Finnegan (2001), find common ground in urging more work on the pros and cons of module study and on module outcomes. These writers point to the (underestimated) popularity of module study and urge more research on those aspects of modular study which associate with student satisfaction and positive labour market outcomes.

To increase the knowledge of modular study, it is basic that correct statistics on module enrolments are reported. Although the situation is improving, the numbers and types of VET students nationally studying by modules tend to be under-recorded and under-represented in the AVETMIS Standard database. Visibly, data from some States are more representative than that from others.

VET module students—characteristics and outcomes

In the body of the report, currently available data from the AVETMISS database and the student outcomes survey is used to generate an analysis of the profiles, enrolment motives, and employment and satisfaction outcomes, for 'module' students. These are defined as students studying one to two modules and no full course.

Module students are on average older than course students and are more likely to be female and to have completed Year 12. In part, this may be considered as a 'sectoral' effect, as similar profiles are found in the ACE group, as compared to VET students generally. There is not much difference between module students and course students in terms of equity group membership or place of residence.

Module students seem to fall into two significant groups. One group is enrolling in modules that would assist them to update technological knowledge in computing and other areas; another is doing so to gain social, educational and employment skills. However, as with course enrolment students, the majority (75%) of module-only students are enrolled in vocationally or technically oriented areas of learning rather than in the basic skills areas.

Students who are studying by modules are less likely than those enrolled in a full course to have their programs funded by government, and more likely to pay for their own tuition fees. Only about 50% of those remaining with the same employer throughout have fees paid by the employer or paid time off work.

The demographic profile of module students, their areas of learning, and their main sources of income support will have implications for the types of courses and course delivery that will suit them best.

Students who choose to study by modules have fairly similar study motives and expectations to those of their colleagues who are proceeding to a full qualification. Students are choosing to study by VET modules because of the flexibility and the opportunity to focus on studying exactly what they want. Similarly to their colleagues who choose to complete a full program, the majority (65%) of module students choose VET training for vocational or work-related reasons rather than non-vocational reasons. Among those nominating vocational reasons, full-program students anticipate

that their VET program would assist them to gain a job, but module students are more inclined to believe that they will gain extra skills to assist them perform their current job more efficiently.

Students who discontinue their VET training before completion of a full program do so for employment (gained or lost a job or acquired necessary job skills) reasons (33%) ahead of training (30%) or personal (28%) reasons. The pattern is different in the case of female students; personal and training-related motives for discontinuation being slightly more common than employment-related motives. As students move out of the younger age brackets, for both males and females, it is also the case that training-related motives—in particular having got what was wanted from training or having changed training plans and horizons—become more common than employment-related motives.

Completers of VET modules are usually (71%) found in employment six months after training, and reasonable proportions (40% and 30%) have moved into employment from unemployment or from being outside the labour force. Employed module completers appear to be spread across industries and occupations in much the same way as employed persons generally.

This report is based mainly on analysis of the student outcomes surveys up to and including 2000. In the 2001 survey compared with 2000, it should be noted, the percentage of module completers in employment six months after training falls slightly (from 71% to 67%), as does the percentage of module completers moving from unemployment into employment (from 40% to 35%). Similar falls, however, are also observable in the case of VET graduates. This suggests that the slightly poorer employment outcomes experienced by module completers in 2001 are due to declines in the labour market rather than declines in the quality or usefulness of module-only training.

While VET modules are effective at assisting students to gain appropriate skills to perform their jobs efficiently, they do not usually serve to change a career altogether. Rather, individuals tend to remain in the same occupation and accrue some (modest) job benefits. Individuals employed before, during and after VET training generally remain in the same occupation and industry of employment following the completion of their VET modules. A moderate proportion (40%) of the employed individuals who remain with the same employer indicate some form of job advancement such as promotion, increased status at work or increased earnings. Module completers, while generally satisfied with VET, are a little less so than TAFE graduates.

At this stage, factors assisting unemployed module students to find employment remain relatively unknown. Perhaps the increased skills or knowledge that these individuals gain from VET training help them to find employment. It is also possible that modules help these individuals gain more confidence to enter the labour force. Whatever the reason, the impact of modular study is significant. Further research into factors assisting unemployed individuals to find employment on completion of VET modules would be valuable.

VET module students—case studies

The case studies were designed to be reasonably representative of the general characteristics of module students, and to follow on from the satisfaction and job outcome findings of the student outcomes survey. They covered 38 students at five TAFE institutes in New South Wales, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. In the group, there were mainly younger men and women in full-time employment, but also some women and men in older age groups rejoining the workforce.

The majority of these students are found to be studying by modules for specific vocational reasons, to upgrade their skills or knowledge for work. If employed, students generally choose their particular modules to gain appropriate skills, and to fill in identified skill gaps, to help them perform in their jobs (or their own businesses) more efficiently. If unemployed, students tend to choose modules to update their skills to re-enter the labour force, sometimes under obligation to Centrelink or CRS.

In general, module students choose to study modules for their great flexibility of study and time commitments, or to meet other educational commitments elsewhere. A number are 'repeat customers', who have found module study has met personal needs on previous occasions, while others are likely to become repeat customers in the future.

With flexibility of study, students can take up the course that is most apt for their needs, at reasonable cost, with reasonable likelihood of success, and with less distraction from peripheral course elements. Module study can break the study into stages that are more manageable in terms of the student's finances, aspirations, and degrees of confidence or competence.

On balance, the case studies suggest that these positives outweigh student concerns such as the disjointedness and social isolation of module study, (possibly) its lesser value to employers, and some module delivery and assessment concerns.

As an indication of the flexibility of module study, several students were found to have their major educational commitments elsewhere, in school education or in university studies. A sign that students can consciously target the modules they need is that a number of the students were found to be applying modules to fill quite specific skill gaps that they felt they were carrying from previous employment experiences, or that would meet specific skill needs in their future employment (or business) plans.

Conclusions and suggested actions

This report on modular study in VET comes at a time when recent evolutions in VET policy (particularly those related to lifelong learning) have had a significant impact on the approach to modules in VET performance measures and performance measurement.

However, work remains to be done. The quantity and quality of the measurement and research do not appear to do justice to the proven utility of modular study to VET clients. The quality of the national collection of module statistics lags behind national

VET policies, and the requirements expressed in the AVETMIS Standard. Modular study is somewhat marginalised in supply-side measurement and research, rather than in the minds of the client group.

Consistently over the past few years, over 40% of the VET student base have been enrolled in just one or two modules. Recent writers on VET modules, the few that there are, point to the underestimation of their popularity and urge more work on factors associated with module satisfaction and outcomes.

The VET client base is very different in its structure and its expressed needs to the higher education client base. 'University students are much younger than TAFE students,' notes NCVER (2001c, p.3). 'TAFE provides courses to meet a wide range of needs; university provides mainly bachelor courses for school leavers.'

These being established differences, there is a stronger case in the VET sector than in the higher education sector for regarding modular (subject or unit) completion as an event of parallel importance for policy and research to the event of graduate completion. The case for streaming the events together in statistical and research work is strong.

The statistical evidence in the report shows up certain differences between VET module students and graduates. The first group is a little older. They are more likely to be females and to possess Year 12 qualifications.

The recent addition of module completers' experiences to those of graduates in the student outcomes survey has boosted knowledge. An important finding from the survey is that both groups are studying mainly for vocational reasons and both are mainly finding jobs after their study is finished.

Within the two vocationally oriented subgroups, the module students are more likely than the graduates to be motivated by improving skills for current jobs, as opposed to gaining skills for new jobs. For those module completers staying on in their existing jobs, there appears (in the student outcomes survey and in the case studies) to be a strong element of personal aspiration and improvement. Only about 50% of these completers have their fees or time off work subsidised by the employer, although the student outcomes survey also shows that about 40% get some tangible job reward from the employer. A related finding is that module completers tend to stay on the same occupational and industry tracks that they were on beforehand. Also, significant proportions of module students are moving into jobs after study, having had no job or no attachment to the labour force beforehand.

There would be value in exploring these employer-related outcomes further, by boosting the student outcomes survey sample of module students or possibly through the VET survey of employers. The latter survey has the advantage of covering non-TAFE providers, who appear well-suited to module provision and have a good share of the national module student base.

In the student outcomes survey, there are certain study, sex and age differences within the module study group itself. These appear to be useful pointers to course planners and to further research.

There appears to be a significant subgroup studying technologically oriented modules (computing) to update employment skills, but perhaps also a second subgroup using modules to build up basic social and employment skills.

Women are a little more likely to discontinue studies for personal or training-related motives, men for employment-related motives. In both sexes, training motives (having got what they wanted out of training or changes in training plan) tend to take over from employment motives in the middle and older student age brackets.

The case studies identify quite specific benefits of VET modular study that outweigh the identified disadvantages. In the students' own words, these benefits are linked with their stages of life and their dispositions as much as with the content or quality of the courses on offer. When they are commending the 'flexibility' of module provision, students have distinct things in their minds.

Modular study enables students to target the courses they need, with less distraction from peripherals. The perceived costs, and the risks of failure, especially after time away from formal study, go down. Study can be staged to fit in with individual needs and primary activities in other sectors of education. Students can plug specific skill gaps remembered from their past work experience or that they can see emerging in the future.

Finally, the underestimated value of modular study, as shown in the VET statistics and student surveys and confirmed in this report, indirectly puts a case for greater planning focus on module efforts in national and State VET plans.

Based on the conclusions above, the following suggestions for action are left for general consideration, or application if useful, by the stakeholders in the VET system.

Actions 1–4 could be taken to apply to the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), the States and Territories, and NCVER as parties together. NCVER is the main national agent for VET statistics, but all parties agree to substantial changes in statistical directions, generally via the National Training Statistics Committee.

Actions 5–7 are directed more to ANTA, States and Territories, employers and training providers, individually or severally.

1. Improving the collection standards for VET module statistics

Work should continue to give full effect to the AVETMIS Standard on collection of module enrolment data, and to iron out inconsistencies between States' collection standards and in published enrolment data.

2. Integrating the measurement and reporting of VET module and course enrolments

Reflecting their importance to the VET system and its students, continued improvement in the measurement and reporting of module enrolments and completions should be sought, with more effective integration with, and comparison to, course enrolments and completions.

3. *Building on the successful introduction of module study into the student outcomes survey*

The valuable consideration of modules and module outcomes alongside graduate outcomes in the student outcomes survey should continue and be expanded, especially in terms of investigating those factors associated with better employment outcomes and job advancement. One approach may be gradually to eliminate the survey distinction between module completers and graduates.

4. *Investigating employers' needs and satisfaction in terms of employee module students*

Noting the value of VET module study to employers and employees, there should be more exploration and encouragement of those aspects that lead to greater employer and job satisfaction, through the survey of employer views of VET, or similar. This should comprehend the critical liaison and teaching roles of TAFE and also private training providers.

5. *Encouraging employers to understand and reward VET modular study*

Noting the wide labour market coverage but mixed employee rewards of module study, ANTA, States and Territories, and employer bodies, could publicise more the employer and employee benefits of module study and the flexibility that it offers.

6. *Encouraging training providers to deliver VET modules appropriately and effectively*

ANTA, State and Territory training authorities, and TAFE directors, could encourage TAFE and other registered training organisations to plan more for the identifiable characteristics and study preferences of module students, to improve their job outcomes and increase repeat business.

7. *Moving modules further into the mainstream of VET planning*

ANTA and the States could give greater prominence to module provisions in State VET plans and related strategic plans, especially where such provisions have the potential to be part of the solution to changes in the composition of the VET client group or rapidly changing skill mixes and skill needs in States' industries and economies. States could give consideration to strategically funding higher proportions of VET module study.

References

Anderson, D 1997a, 'Clients in the training market: Facts and fiction', in *Good thinking good practice: Research perspectives on learning and work*, 5th Annual International Conference on Post-compulsory Education and Training, Surfers Paradise, Centre for Learning and Work Research, Griffith University, pp.13–30.

Anderson, D 1997b, *Competition and market reform in the Australian VET sector*, NCVER, Adelaide.

ANTA (Australian National Training Authority) 1998, *A bridge to the future: Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training*, ANTA, Brisbane.

— 1999, *Key performance measures for vocational education and training*, ANTA, Brisbane.

— 2000, *Australian flexible learning framework for VET 2000–2004*, ANTA, Brisbane.

DEWRSB (Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business) 2001, *Annual report 2000-01*, DEWRSB, Canberra.

Dumbrell, T 2000, *Review of research: Measuring the outcomes of vocational education and training*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Dumbrell, T, de Montfort, R & Finnegan, W 2001, *Outcomes for VET diploma and associate diploma students*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Foyster, J, Fai, HK & Shah, C 2000, *Student flows through Australian TAFE courses*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Maxwell, G, Cooper, M & Biggs, N 2000, *How people choose vocational education and training programs: Social, educational and personal influences on aspiration*, NCVER, Adelaide.

NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) 1999a, *Australian vocational education and statistics 1998: In detail*, NCVER, Adelaide.

— 1999b, *Student outcomes survey 1999: National report*, NCVER, Adelaide.

— 2000a, *Australian vocational education and training statistics 1999: In detail*, NCVER, Adelaide.

— 2000b, *Statistics 1999: At a glance*, NCVER, Adelaide.

— 2000c, *Student outcomes survey 2000: In summary*, NCVER, Adelaide.

— 2000d, *Student outcomes survey 2000: National report*, NCVER, Adelaide.

— 2001a, *Australian adult and community education: An overview*, NCVER, Adelaide.

— 2001b, *Statistics 2000: At a glance*, NCVER, Adelaide.

— 2001c, *TAFE and university graduates: At a glance*, NCVER, Adelaide.

— 2001d, *Student outcomes survey 2001: In summary*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Appendix A: Project brief used in case studies

Module enrolments in vocational education and training: their role in employment and lifelong learning

Background

The encouragement of lifelong learning, re-skilling and up-skilling is one of the aims of the VET system. The encouragement of 'module' enrolments in VET, in addition to full program enrolments towards qualifications, gives practical effect to that aim.

A 'module enrollee' may be thought of as a student enrolled in a course at a technical and further education (TAFE) institute who is not intending to proceed to a qualification. Statistical analysis of the students outcomes survey has suggested that these students have motives and expectations regarding their studies which are different to those of their colleagues who are proceeding to a full qualification.

This NCVER project uses case studies derived from focus groups and interviews, conducted face to face, to obtain the perspectives of students undertaking VET by modules only. Students, enrolled in modules only, are selected across three States to provide insights into the demographic, motivational and course-related factors influencing their path of study.

It is intended that the research report will identify indicators which can guide institutes and individuals towards recommendations for more appropriate module provision and module enrolment. Furthermore, it is expected that the research will provide valuable insight into the role of modules in lifelong learning.

Appendix B: Questions used in case studies

Questions for focus groups and in-depth interviews

Are you studying voluntarily, or are you required to do so under some form of obligation—such as to your employer (if employed) or Centrelink (if unemployed)?

Did you choose to study by modules or would you have preferred to enrol in a full course?

Why did you choose the particular modules you are studying?

e.g. if employed:
– for your current job – for a higher level job in the same field – or for an altogether different type of job?
e.g. if unemployed:
– to get employment – or as part of a change in career direction?

What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of undertaking VET by modules instead of as a full course?

Do you expect that the modules you are enrolled in will contribute significantly to achievement of your training goals? (eg. do you think they will give you useful new skills which can be of benefit to you in your working career?)

Do you think completion of the modules you are enrolled in will change your employment status?

e.g. if employed:
– do you expect to move up the career ladder to a better job or higher earnings upon completion of your training modules?
– if you are currently working part time, will you be seeking full-time employment upon completion of your training modules, and if so, do you expect to be successful?
e.g. if unemployed:
– do you think completion of the modules you are enrolled in will help you find employment? And, will you be looking for full or part-time employment?

Do you think the modules you are undertaking are providing you with the sorts of knowledge and skills an employer wants?

Are you paying the tuition fees for the modules that you're studying, or are some or all of the fees paid by someone else — such as by your employer (if employed) or Centrelink (if unemployed)?

Following completion of the modules in which you are currently enrolled, do you expect to undertake more training in the VET sector?

Briefly comment on how satisfied (1) you are with the following aspects of your VET training:

- Teaching, instruction
  - instructor's knowledge of subject content
  - instructor's ability to relate to students
  - balance between instruction and practice
  - are methods of assessment clearly defined?

- The training
  - is module content relevant to your study goals (e.g. job you are seeking)?
  - does module content reflect current industry practice?
  - is presentation of the training satisfactory?

- The equipment and resources
  - quality of equipment provided for you to practise your skills
  - availability of equipment on which to practise your skills
  - access to library and learning resources

- Access
  - convenience both of venue and class times

- Administration and information
  - administration – the handling of enquiries, enrolment, fee payment, results
  - adequacy of information you received when choosing your training

- Student support services
  - information about careers and jobs available to you
  - student counselling services

- Overall quality of training
  - overall usefulness of the training in relation to your job prospects
  - overall quality of the training

Note: (1) Students were asked to rate their satisfaction with each aspect on a five-point scale, with one corresponding to 'extremely dissatisfied' and five to 'extremely satisfied'.

NCVER

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research is Australia's primary research and development organisation in the field of vocational education and training.

NCVER undertakes and manages research programs and monitors the performance of Australia's training system.

NCVER provides a range of information aimed at improving the quality of training at all levels.

ISBN 1 74096 043 2 print edition
ISBN 1 74096 044 0 web edition

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").